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OSMOND,

A TALE.

BY THE AUTHOR

OF

"THE FAVOURITE OF NATURE."

Evil and strong seducing passions prey
On soaring minds, and win them from their way;
Who then to Vice the subject spirits give,
And in the service of the conqueror live;
Like captive Sampson making sport for all,
Who fear'd their strength, and glory in their fall.—CRABBE.

SECOND EDITION.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR G. AND W. B. WHITTAKER,
AVE-MARIA LANE.
1823.

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OSMOND.

CHAP. I.

We shall now present our hero in the character of a husband. United, as he supposed, upon a principle of esteem and rational admiration, rather than of passionate attachment with Lady Ellen, for one year Osmond believed himself to be a happy man. At the end of that time he began to be haunted with slight, as yet but *very* slight inclinations, a little in opposition to the prevailing tastes

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of his wife; but as they were of a trivial nature, consisting chiefly in a desire for greater gaiety, and participation in the pursuits of fashion, than her quiet habits and delicate health rendered her disposed to enjoy, they had, by the mutual sacrifice of their own wishes, contrived to arrive at the first anniversary of their union, without much alteration in the feelings which had on that day, in the preceding year, led them to the altar. On Lady Ellen's part, indeed, there was an alteration; but it was only the alteration which almost invariably takes place in the attachment of the bride and the wife. The tenderness, the glory, the delight, the thousand new and charming emotions which live in the heart of woman for the object of her love, heretofore repressed at the suggestions

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of maidenly reserve, now beamed forth with undiminished force; and if affection, so pure, so truly fixed upon the intellectual superiority of its object, could be carried into weakness, it was so by Lady Ellen. Is it pride or perverseness, or what is that inevitable principle in man's nature, which makes him grow indifferent in proportion as he perceives that he excites affection? Rochefoucault informs us, that, "We are much nearer loving those that hate us, than those who love us more than we like;" and though the sentiment is odious, there is something in it which reminds us of truth; and which may, in a remote degree, convey an idea of the vague feelings which at this period began to steal upon Osmond.

Not, however, be it understood, that

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he was any thing like indifferent to Lady Ellen. His increased knowledge of her virtues, and his real admiration of her accomplished mind, were amongst the strongest and most steady of his sentiments; and though, at times, desirous of seeing her mix more with society, and anxious, that, as *his* wife, she should be more seen and heard of, he could not but anticipate with feelings of exquisite pleasure, the glowing welcome—the delightful smile—the fond embrace, with which, on his frequent absences to town in attendance on his parliamentary duty, he knew so well he should be received by her, on his return to Richmond. Then, as they sat together enjoying the contemplation of the declining summer's day, she *inhaling*, as it were, his account of

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the speech he had been making in the House, or the manner in which such or such distinguished persons had complimented him, her attachment, so visibly, yet so sweetly betrayed, seemed to him a rich repayment for any absence from those fluttering pleasures, in which he sometimes sought to induce her to find gratification.

She occasionally yielded to his desire of entering into them; but it was always with a sigh—always with a gentle regret.—"Ah! if Osmond felt the happiness that I do here," she would say, looking round upon the sweet retreat, always dear to her, but now enshrined in her remembrance, as the spot in which the first happy days of her marriage had been spent—"if he saw the charms in this dear place that I do,

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how ill would he think them exchanged for noisy crowds—bustling assemblies—groups of persons who care nothing for us!"—and then, with a feeling akin to that which Milton so beautifully describes as possessing Eve, she would walk round her lawns and gardens, looking at every plant and tree as if she discerned new beauties in them unperceived before.

But the necessity for weaning her mind from what she willingly allowed to be, what Osmond called it, a weakness, now became absolute; for the time was arrived when Lady Arlington, who had, at the desire of her eldest son, occupied the family-house in Piccadilly, having met with a residence more suitable to her inclination, begged to resign her former habitation to Osmond; and

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his brother having consented, it was agreed upon that he should take up his abode, during the sitting of Parliament, entirely in town.

This intelligence came in the form of the first cloud of sorrow that had visited Lady Ellen since her marriage. It was in vain that Lady Arlington (to whom she ventured to express the repugnance she felt to living in London,) endeavoured to reason it away.

"I acknowledge the truth of every argument you produce, my dearest mother," she replied; "but my feelings, on this occasion, are such as no argument can reach—they seem to be prophetic—but I see you are laughing at me," she continued, observing Lady Arlington's smile; "so I will say no more."

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"I can *but* laugh, my dear girl," replied Lady Arlington, "to hear *you* talk of prophetic feelings — remarks about fate and presentiment are very well from the lips of those who have nothing to say in justification of prejudices; but those who act from the suggestions of reason disdain these whims of imagination, as you will do in the course of a week, when you find all these forebodings gone, and discover that they were nothing more than the effusions of regret at leaving a spot, to which you are naturally enough very much attached."

To such remarks Lady Ellen had nothing to reply; but they had no power to soothe away her reluctance to quitting Richmond, which increased, as the destined time approached, to a de-

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gree that astonished even herself, and somewhat displeased Osmond.

"I am sorry, Lady Ellen," said he, as they were riding to town, "I am very sorry, indeed, that you have been prevailed upon to agree to this change of abode; since it appears that *no* consideration can make it agreeable to *you*, however desirable it may be for me."

"My dear Osmond," she replied, removing her hand from her forehead, and dispersing the tears she had laboured to repress, "do not think me averse to this measure—it *is* desirable for you—how can it then be otherwise than agreeable to me? But I am so fond of Richmond—I always was fond of it:—and there I have spent such happy days—I was married there, you know, Osmond." And she looked at

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him with such genuine affection, that it seemed impossible to refrain from kissing away the tears which mingled with her tender smile.

"God bless you, my dear Ellen," he said, "I feel as if you were a million times too good for me, and as if I did not love you half enough; but who is there that could deserve you?—who is there that—"

"Hush, Osmond," she replied, playfully putting her hand before his mouth, "the time for these extravagant compliments is past—our matrimony is more than a year old; and, moreover, we are now going into an atmosphere somewhat unfavourable to transports."

"True," said he; "I must learn the fashionable calm deportment of a husband:" he spoke laughingly, but she

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thought his words had a meaning beyond what met the ear; and she sighed. "But if the exterior *must* change a little, Ellen," he continued, "the heart is the same."

"God grant it!" she fervently replied, and after a short silence, Osmond fell upon other topics of discourse.

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CHAP. II.

But new solicitudes began now to occupy the mind of Lady Ellen; for the time was approaching when she expected to become a mother.

She presented Osmond with a son, and the happiness of both of them was for a time complete; but as with every additional blessing, additional cares spring up, to warn the too confiding spirit, that, in the midst of this world's joy, there *must* be imperfection, this child, so dear to both, but to his mother as a new and precious tie, more firmly binding her to the love of Osmond—the

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delight of her soul—this cherished babe was sickly, and required the utmost care and attention in nursing, to leave a chance of its being reared up. This care and attention it was a solace and a pleasure to Lady Ellen to afford her son—no hireling nurse was deputed to watch by his little bed, or do any service that an affectionate mother could so much better perform. Her anxiety was more than repaid in every accession of strength which she delighted to fancy he acquired under her vigilant care—and when, at the end of three months, she obtained from her physician an opinion that the boy was certainly thriving, and, he conceived, might now, with due management and attention, be expected to get on, her joy was such, that Osmond, who had never ventured to suggest the

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idea of her entering into any amusement whilst her time and thoughts were so wholly devoted to the child, took this favourable opportunity of recommending a little change of scene.

"Colonel Howard and Lady Jane want us to dine there to-morrow, my love," said he; "you cannot do better than accept their invitation."

But she declined it, and Osmond, after ineffectually arguing the point a short time, left the room, carelessly remarking as he went out, "well, then, if you will not, I must go without you."

"*Must* go," she half repeated, as the door closed after him; and the necessity did not appear to her so very urgent for his going at all.

Osmond was at this time getting very intimate with Lady Jane and her hus-

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band; and but that her little Osmond at home occupied too much of her mind to leave room for any other anxiety than what arose on his account, Lady Ellen could have made herself uncomfortable about it. Lady Jane Howard was in no respect different from what she had been as Lady Jane Eustace. The same flippancy of remark, the same slight, careless, indifferent manner of going through life, characterized her still. As a wife, and as a mother, nothing had yet occurred to give her apparently one serious notion; and half her enjoyment appeared to consist, as it had always done, in turning every thing that was really important into a jest.

It had been, therefore, a subject of infinite merriment to her, that Lady Ellen should be the nurse of her own child,

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and seclude herself from all society, the better to perform the duties of her new situation; and a profusion of wit had been the consequence on the part of Lady Jane, which, as long as it approached only herself, the former had submitted to with the most polite indifference: but it had given her real pain to remark how galling these sarcasms had proved to Osmond, and how sensible an effect they produced upon his temper.

The good sense of Lady Ellen would have rendered her perfectly aware of the horror most men, particularly young men, entertain of being implicated in the politics of a nursery; but her strong affection for her boy somewhat blinded her judgment in the present case; and made her sometimes, with anguish, attri-

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bute to want of affection for the child, the weariness with which Osmond had of late listened to her upon this eternal theme; and which, though resulting in a great degree from his mind being occupied with subjects that he considered of more importance, was in some measure attributable, as Lady Ellen supposed it to be, to the raillery of Lady Jane.

But this she tormented herself with thinking would never operate to affect his conduct in her Ladyship's absence. If the baby was as dear to him as to her, he could not be satisfied with those formal inquiries after his health, without any desire of seeing him, which for the last week or two had taken place of his daily visit to the nursery.

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But Lady Ellen in this instance did her husband injustice. He dearly loved his son, but he conceived that his wife's solicitude on the subject was carried to an extreme that bordered upon folly; and as such, he could not give it countenance by taking any share in it. He felt assured that her anxieties went beyond the occasion, and that the child was decidedly improving in health and strength every day; and when his opinion was confirmed by that of the physician, he imagined the time was come in which she ought to sacrifice her own wishes a little more to his, and be ready to resume some of those pleasures which it was more agreeable to him to partake of in her society.

Hence, when she declined the invitation of Lady Jane, he left her in some

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displeasure which he evinced by not returning home any more that day.

It was the first unkindness he had ever shewn her; and her affectionate heart was very deeply wounded by it; and still more so, when, misinterpreting her silence, and real distress at the idea of having offended him, into a species of reproach, Osmond preserved on the following day a haughtiness of demeanour, which, though she well knew he was capable enough of assuming before those who displeased him, she little expected him to evince towards her.

She bore it as long as she possibly could, but when he was leaving the house, as she suspected to return to it no more that day, it was in vain she sought to conceal her tears.

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"What is the matter, Ellen?" said he, "is the child worse?"

She faintly murmured, "No," but attempted not another word.

"Then what is the meaning of this uneasiness?" he continued; "surely, Ellen, you—*you* are not going to descend into the caprices of your very capricious sex? I was happy in believing that I had in my wife a woman very far superior to them."

She could not attempt a reply; tears, she knew, would have interrupted her, before she could have uttered a single sentence; and, dearly as she loved Osmond, she felt at this moment unwilling to display to him all the power he had over her happiness; for she thought him unkind—almost unfeeling.

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But this was not the case; for he was suffering nearly as much as herself; and nothing but pride, his besetting sin, restrained him from clasping her to his heart, with real sincerity of affection, and endeavouring to soothe away her discomfort.

Both of them, however, did, as many under similar circumstances had done before them; and yielding to a mistaken idea of each other's sentiments, with hearts most fondly yearning to be reconciled and happy, parted, nevertheless, with cold civility; Osmond to pursue the engagements of the day, and Lady Ellen to console herself for more real sorrow than she had yet experienced since she became the wife of Osmond, by indulging in the society of her infant.

It was a consolation, indeed, most

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valued and delightful, but now incapable of soothing into peace the misery that depressed her.

Osmond's love was so much dearer to her than any other earthly blessing, that when estranged from it, though ever so slightly, all things lost their power to charm. Never had she passed so melancholy a day as this; as if the real evil were not sufficient, her imagination tortured her with ten thousand chimeras. She pictured to herself the easy gaiety of Lady Jane, exerted for the amusement of Osmond—the contrast it must excite in his mind, with the sombre, perhaps, as he would consider it, the sullen disposition of the wife he had left at home; and then she would deeply regret that she had not obliged him, by accompanying him as he de-

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sired. Like all those who give the reins to fancy, she proceeded from surmise to certainty, till she ended her visions in a state of feeling absolutely wretched.

While she was thus distressed, Osmond was not wholly at his ease. That fine moral sense which does unquestionably vibrate the most acutely in those bosoms which have most need of its dictates, several times warned him of error, and more than once prompted him to return home, and shew some conciliation towards her. But when he considered that, for the last three months, he had yielded every wish of his own to hers, he could not but conceive himself as the affronted party, in having the first desire he had expressed, rejected.

When he came back, therefore, to dress for his engagement, it was not

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only without seeking her, but even without one inquiry after her.

But it was not thus that he was permitted to depart. The only comfort with which Lady Ellen had solaced her disquietude, during this painful morning, had been with indulging a faint hope that Osmond would seek her when he returned to dress.

She had desired to be informed as soon as he came in; and when the wished-for intelligence was brought her, at the period of her acquaintance with him, had she experienced such agitating emotions, as those with which she waited the chance of his approaching her apartment. But in vain she listened for the sound of his well-known footsteps—all was silent.

It was not in *her* nature to be govern-

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ed by the dictates of pride. Love in its most sweet and gentle character held dominion over her breast; and when, by such unusual indications on his side, she perceived that she had indeed been unfortunate enough to displease her husband, no pausing to consider how far he was justified in taking offence, restrained the tender dictates of her heart, which prompted her to seek him immediately, and win back, by every concession, the affection on which she might be said to exist.

Osmond had just finished the duties of his toilette, and again was hesitating whether or not to make his appearance before her, when her gentle knock at the door, made him almost blush at the idea of having reduced her, by his ill-judged

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pride, to the humiliation of having to seek him.

His resentment fled at the sight of her pale, wet cheek, and the inarticulate efforts she made to address him. "Have I offended you, Osmond?—have I?"

"My dearest Ellen!"—he could utter no more—but more was unnecessary, for in the embrace of reconciliation every sorrow was speedily forgotten.

"And now, Osmond," she continued, "if it is not too late, I will accompany you to Lady Jane's.—Why did you not *command* it?" and she laughed. "You must be authoritative with me, and then you will see how well I can obey."

"Teach me only what you would have me to be—dearest—best of women," he replied, "and that I will

endeavour to prove. But, love, I will compromise this matter of dining out—Lady Jane is going to the Opera to-night, and I will return for you to join her party.

Scarcely could Osmond have named the proposition, to which Lady Ellen would not, in the present moment of recovered happiness, have joyfully acceded.

Osmond left her with a promise of returning for her at ten o'clock for the Opera.

Never did a bride attire herself with greater care, or with more solicitude to charm, than Lady Ellen on this evening arrayed her elegant form to the best advantage, to please her husband, and justify his choice in the eyes of the world. It was her first appearance in public for many months; and Osmond

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she knew, though silent upon the subject, had sometimes considered her not sufficiently mindful of fashion in her dress, nor of the observation which persons in elevated situations are liable to attract. To gratify him, therefore, she had spent more time and thought about the embellishment of her person on this evening, than she had ever been tempted to bestow upon it before.

Her labour was not lost; for Osmond, who, like the generality of his sex, had a pride in seeing every thing nearly or remotely connected with himself exhibited in the best point of view, was particularly struck with the improvement her assiduous care to please him had produced.

"I never saw you look so well, Ellen," said he, as he took her hand to

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lead her to the carriage; "only I shall bargain for the taking off this great shawl."

"I will buy your promise before I set out," he continued, with a laugh, and in high spirits he was drawing her towards him for the purpose of "sealing the contract," as he called it, with a salute, when the servant entered with a letter.

"By the two-penny post, Sir," said he, approaching and giving it to Osmond, who, without looking at the direction, was throwing it aside till another opportunity, when a sudden thought seemed to strike him, and he took it up again. He did not this time carelessly fling it from him; for having attentively gazed at the address and at the seal, the colour from his cheeks re-

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ceded, his gaiety subsided, and without speaking, he was leaving the room. Lady Ellen, alarmed by such a change, followed him to the door.

"What is the matter, my dear Ormond?" she exclaimed; "that letter—what can be its contents, when the mere sight of the hand-writing—"

"Oh, the letter is nothing," he replied, with a forced smile, which but ill concealed the violent agitation he was suffering; "I was merely going to inquire if any one waited for an answer."

"It came by the post, my dear—did you not hear the servant say so?"

"Oh true—yes—so he did—I forgot—it is of no consequence—I have not even read it; you used—come, it is time to go;" and in evident anxiety to

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escape from the subject, he led her forward, both of them by this trifling incident changed in an instant from the happy laughing pair, that five minutes before were just about to descend the staircase.

The forced attempts of Osmond to resume his gaiety, as they went along, rather served to heighten than allay the fears of his wife.

Her anxiety to learn something respecting the contents of the letter was so strong, that several times as they went along she was on the point of entreating him to read it by the light of the lamps, before they entered the Opera-House; but she felt scrupulously averse from seeming to force herself upon his confidence, and in a state of mind the most wandering and uneasy,

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she was conducted by Osmond to Lady Jane's box.

She found her Ladyship in high spirits, laughing and talking with a gentleman to whom Lady Ellen was a stranger; whilst Colonel Howard was silently amusing himself with taking a survey of the audience with his glass.

As soon as Osmond had joined for a short time in the conversation which ensued on their entrance, he left the box, excusing his absence by saying, he saw a gentleman in the pit with whom he wished to exchange a few words.

In vain the searching glance of Lady Ellen followed his departure. She was satisfied he did not go into the pit, but that he retired for the purpose of perus-

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ing the mysterious document he had not yet found an opportunity of looking at unobserved.

Her perturbation of spirits rendered it impossible for her to take any part in the usual flippancy of Lady Jane's style of conversation. With a languid smile, as she besought her Ladyship's excuse for being so *outré* as to attend to the music, she endeavoured to make her silence and abstraction pass for the effect of her being occupied in listening to the opera. It was one which, at any other time, it would have cost her no effort to be delighted with; but not all the charms of Mozart's music, or Catalani's performance, could distract her thoughts from the suspense which tortured them.

The time of Osmond's absence seemed to her an age. It was indeed a very

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long interval, for the opera came to an end, and the first act of the ballet was concluded, and still he returned not. She dreaded every moment that Lady Jane would make some comment upon the subject; for, however inattentive to the society of her own sex, she was prone to set some value upon that of the other, inasmuch as it generally brought her the sort of adulation it was most congenial to her disposition to receive.

But she was at present so well occupied in talking with the gentleman who accompanied her, that she appeared not to have observed Osmond's absence, till Colonel Howard pointing out to his friend a person whom they both wanted to see, they left the box together, and Lady Jane, who could on no account remain silent for two minutes together,

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for lack of any other person to address, began to converse with Lady Ellen.

"I am extremely happy," said she, addressing her as if she had but that moment perceived her presence, "to see you out again. Lessingham complains most terribly of your monopolizing yourself with that child. Oh, by the bye, talking of children puts me in mind of my affairs of that sort. I fancied my boy and girl were sick, or sorry, or something they ought not to be, so I have packed them off to Hampstead for change of air; and I must go and look after them once a week, just for the credit of the thing, though I have no particular fancy for maternal solicitudes, and sentimentalities of that kind."

Her Ladyship paused a moment; and Lady Ellen, conceiving herself called

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upon for a reply, made a slight bend, and Lady Jane proceeded.

"Now I know that you have a taste for these matters; and as I dare say (though by infinite good fortune you possess but one of these interesting babies) you understand a great deal more of the nature of them, than I who am afflicted with two, I really should take it as a particular favour if you would ride over with me some morning to Hampstead, and see if you can make out what is the matter with these *petites infortunées*, as Howard's affected mother suffocates me with calling them; when, Heaven knows, 'tis I that am the *infortunée*, if any there be, in having two sick children. But "see the conquering hero comes," pursued her Ladyship, with an ironical smile, observing the

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joy which danced in Lady Ellen's eyes, as the box-door opened, and Osmond appeared at it.

"Where have you been?" asked Lady Jane; but perceiving an unusual shade of gravity upon his brow, "been weeping, I think," she continued, "only that this is not exactly the valley of tears."

He attempted some raillery in reply: but even Lady Jane perceived that it was *but* an attempt; for turning to a chair which was vacant by the side of Lady Ellen, she placed herself upon it, with a remark, that "she should just take a look at Albert, for he was much more brilliant at this moment, she believed, than Osmond."

Colonel Howard at this instant returning, Osmond observed to his wife,

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"the carriages in waiting, Ellen, when-ever you like to go."

This was joyful intelligence, and she rose with alacrity to depart.

"Well, shall I call upon you to-morrow morning, for this pious excursion?" said Lady Jane, addressing Lady Ellen, who having acceded to her proposal, took her leave, and retired with Osmond.

He did not now even affect to be at ease. In silence he handed her into the carriage, and after he had taken his seat in it, he spoke not, but leaned his head backwards, covering it with his hand, and seeming to be lost in melancholy musing.

Not for an instant did Lady Ellen cease to watch these strange indications of sorrow, for which nothing that she

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could imagine to have befallen him sufficiently accounted. His habits were all temperate and regular. No sudden embarrassment for money was at all likely to have occurred in his affairs. He could have lost no near and dear relative, without her being as much interested in such an event as himself, and therefore certain of being made acquainted with it as soon as it had happened. No, it was some hidden source of grief, clearly of the most painful nature, but such as he wished to keep secret.

But much as she respected his wishes, her feelings at the present moment were too much excited to be subdued without some effort to gratify them. She could not bear him, after she had at his request retired to her apartment, she

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could not hear him pacing up and down in the room below her's, which was his library, and, as she once or twice fancied, audibly venting in tears and lamentations the woe that had fallen upon him, without overcoming every scruple, and stealing down to him, to offer such consolation, as her affection, and best judgment could propose to alleviate his distress.

It was the second time that day that she had intruded upon his solitude; and a dread of being importunate made her pause before she laid her hand upon the lock of the door. But at that moment she distinctly heard a sound, low, and suppressed; but it was the sound of extreme anguish, and not another instant did she delay to enter. She forgot, in her zeal to soothe him, to announce

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her approach by any previous signal; and Osmond, in a paroxysm of anger at the intrusion, rose (for she perceived that he had been kneeling), and before he distinguished the intruder, furiously commanded her to "begone;" but immediately perceiving who it was that had stolen upon his privacy, he spoke in milder accents.

"Is it you, Ellen?" he said; "why is this—why do you—" he paused, before he added, "why do you pursue me thus?"

"I come to comfort you, Osmond, for I know that you are in distress—my dear husband, do not turn from me thus. If I cannot counsel you, I can weep with you; and where should any of your tears fall, but here, Osmond—*here?*"—and she pressed his hand to her heart.

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"Great Heaven! have I deserved this mercy?" he exclaimed; "have I merited the attachment of this exalted woman!" Then turning upon her a countenance struggling with conflicting emotions, but in which tenderness and admiration were greatly predominant, "my own Ellen," he said, "my wife, trust to me, dearest—confide in my continued love, and try to forget that I have a thought unconfessed to you—you must not ask me what disturbs me—it will pass away—believe me, love, it will pass away—" and he made an effort to smile as he spoke: but it was a smile which affected Lady Ellen even more than his tears.

She was silent, and Osmond, apparently dreading her observation, and desiring her absence, continued with more ease

nesses.—"If my peace is dear to you, Ellen, nay, if you value your own, forget the events of this evening—I repeat to you, that however they may seem to have disturbed my repose, it is only a transient interruption. I cannot explain their nature to you, neither would it be necessary to give you the trouble of listening to it were I at liberty to do so. To-morrow, be assured, you will see me restored to happiness; till to-morrow, therefore, forget me."

"Forget you, Osmond!" she repeated, looking at him half fondly—half reproachfully.

Ah, what event, she thought, (as perceiving her absence would be a relief to him, she affectionately took her leave,) and retired,—"what event of life could drive *me* to form the dreadful wish

that Osmond should forget *me!* But woman's love is not like that of man—it is so entirely her all—her very life—her soul!"

"Ah, it is too much!" she continued, after a short musing; "this state of being is too imperfect for this fond idolatry. I am wrong—I give to the creature what is only due to the Creator. Alas! I am very unhappy—I am very unhappy."

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CHAP. III.

It was in a frame of mind but ill calculated for sustaining any part in the trifling discourse of Lady Jane, that on the following morning Lady Ellen prepared for the appointment she had made with her.

But as her habits were those of vigilant exertion, whenever exertion became a duty, she repressed the unwillingness she felt, and which all who are in a state of mental uneasiness must naturally feel, to force the mind from the subject of disquietude, and compel it to *make*, if it cannot find, an interest in any thing that is foreign to it.

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It is inconceivable, to those who have never tried this expedient of chasing away sorrow, how insuperable, by perseverance, such a custom will become. To listen to frivolous conversation, to fix the attention upon uninteresting objects, to smile, and seem pleased and occupied when the heart is aching, appear to be petty trials of patience, which many persons amongst the best disposed consider as too trifling to be worthy of exciting any species of self-command. They reserve their energies for grand occasions; and hence it is that we see so many who bear magnanimously the most heavy afflictions, incapable of supporting without murmurs, or some indication of ill-humour, the least obstruction of their will in trifles; forgetting, as the excellent Mrs. More so

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truly remarks, that, "instead of little renunciations being grievous, and petty self-denials hardships, they, in reality, soften grievances, diminish hardships: they are the private drill which trains for public service."

None was more aware than Lady Ellen, not only from observation, but experience, of the value of these self-denying habits; for often had the exercise of them befriended her in the discipline she had been obliged to exert over her heart and affections, during the period in which she believed her attachment to Osmond was misplaced—or, more properly speaking, unjustified by reason.

Often had she been roused from too charming recollections by a summons

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to attend some distant acquaintance, whose fashionable jargon, however unmeaning and indifferent to her at any other period, had a value in it, when it served the purpose of drawing her from vain and dangerous contemplations.

There had been moments of painful lassitude, so overpowering, indeed, that the mere act of reading a page in a book of the most interesting character, was a task she scarcely knew how to undertake. Then it was that the sound of "My lady, the gardener is here for orders;"—"my lady, the child from the school has called," was welcomed as a signal for exertion; and in the mere act of controlling inclination, however slight the cause which excited the act, she gathered the inward satisfaction

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which never fails to accompany a sacrifice of the will—be the sacrifice never so small.

It was irksome to her, indeed, to fulfil her engagement with Lady Jane; for never had she risen so oppressed, so subdued by vague apprehensions, by dark presages, by anticipations of evil, as on this day.

Far from justifying his assurance to her, that the morrow would find him restored to tranquillity, Osmond, after a sleepless night, in which the wretchedness of his heart had frequently betrayed itself by stifled groans and repressed tears, early left his apartment; and when, for the first time that day, she had a distinct view of his countenance, as they met at breakfast, its hollow cast of grief, its ashy paleness—the traces

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of extreme emotion which remained upon it—and the tremor of his nerveless hands—alarmed her beyond the power of speaking.

She gazed upon him with feelings of surprise that bordered upon terror. He met her earnest, anxious eye, and turned from it with restless dissatisfaction.

"I am not well," said he, observing her about to speak; "you are going to ask me, Ellen, what is the matter?—I cannot tell you—I don't know—I am nervous—nothing more."

"I will not be questioned," he continued, in an impatient tone; "I tell you I am not well—and I am irritable—and I cannot bear to be tortured with questions which I cannot answer—for I know not what ails me. There now—now I have offended you!"

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"No, Osmond—not offended"—and she walked to the window to struggle with her tears, or hide them.

"Upon my soul, Ellen, I wonder you can give way to this folly!" said he, angry with her, because she had made him angry with himself; till, observing her tears to increase into sobs, he burst out of the room with an execration upon himself, which it rived her very heart to hear.

This impetuous scene left her, at first, so miserable, that she sat down to write an excuse to Lady Jane for breaking her appointment; but, as we have observed, her prevailing habits of discipline restrained her from sending it; and having carried her sorrows to that fountain of peace, to those waters of comfort, beside which religion leads

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her afflicted votaries, she went with composed feelings to indulge awhile in the contemplation of her child—to turn, as pious and benevolent natures will ever turn, under the pressure of sorrow, to some cherished comfort—some token of divine benevolence, which, in favour to its suffering creatures, is generally, amidst the severest privations, left behind: for, if all else be gone—friends—fortune—health,—the sense of duty is not gone—the hope of immortality is not gone—the sublime and animating love of the Creator is not gone. Oh, then how much is left, when all that the vain world so fondly idolizes is taken away—how much to comfort and to ameliorate the heart!

So well had Lady Ellen soothed away her emotion by the time her expected

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visitor arrived, that nothing remained of its vestiges in her appearance to excite the remarks of Lady Jane, which she was well aware would have been without ceremony expressed, had such been the case.

Their ride to Hampstead would have been an entertaining one, to any person fond of, what is commonly called, *small-talk* and scandal. Lady Jane dealt very much in such wares of conversation, and communicated them without reserve to any body disposed to share in them.

After having discussed the private history of most of her acquaintance, and informed Lady Ellen of the state of their domestic politics, she proceeded to a subject which, amongst others of

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similar importance, occupied a considerable portion of her time and thoughts.

"Have you seen any thing at Allen's at all worth looking at, lately?" she inquired; then darting off, as she generally did, to something apparently quite unconnected with the subject she had just entered upon, "by the way, there is something there particularly well worth looking at, as Howard tells me; but being in the shape of a very pretty girl, it is rather more in his line than mine."

"I should have conceived *you* to know better than Colonel Howard, what Mrs. Allen has worth looking at," replied Lady Ellen, with a smile, "unless you take him with you on your millinery expeditions."

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"Oh, not I—but somebody else does, I suppose: his mother perhaps, or Lady Dover, or Miss Anderson, or some desolate old woman, who is proud of being able to boast of a man in her train; however, it does not signify to me how he got there—there he has been—and there he tells me is to be seen the loveliest creature that ever your eyes beheld—tall—slender—no, let me see, not tall—I think he said she was *petite*—ah, yes, he did, I remember, because he gave that as an objection to her not serving as a model to Sir —— for his proposed picture of Juno—or Minerva—or some of those people; but he thought she would be the very thing for a Magdalen, for she is of the *penseroso* order; and in a decline too—nothing can be better—he promised to

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take Sir Thomas there, one morning, to look at her."

"Surely the poor girl could not bear—"

"Oh, that's all stuff, you know—he would not think of asking *her* opinion of the matter; the girl would be proud enough of having her head stuck against the wall in Somerset House."

"But the coarseness of such a proceeding, without asking her consent, or consulting her feelings in any respect!"

"Lord, my dear creature, you amuse me infinitely!" interrupted Lady Jane; "you certainly are a most primitive person,—you talk about the feelings of Mrs. Allen's young ladies, as if you did not know what sort of young ladies they were!"

"I should be very sorry to stigma-

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tize any class of beings, merely because they are in a state of dependence," replied Lady Ellen; "but if I really imagined there was any thing serious in the insinuation you have thrown out, I should certainly withdraw *my* countenance from Mrs. Allen."

"Lord help you! then you must seek for your milliner in the upper regions, I believe!" said Lady Jane, laughing immoderately.

"I believe you must have your joke," retorted Lady Ellen, good-humouredly; "and it is not worth attending to how much of it is founded in truth."

They had now passed through the town of Hampstead, and were coming in sight of the inn which looks upon the heath. Accidentally Lady Ellen

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turned her eyes upon the building, and at that instant a servant came out of the door whom she recognized as Osmond's groom; and then she perceived two horses to be in waiting, one of which being a remarkably fine grey one, she knew at once as that which Osmond generally rode.

It was no unusual thing for him to take an airing on horseback every day, and she would have thought it nothing extraordinary to have met him riding at so short a distance from town; but it struck her as singular, that his servant and horses should be waiting for him at an inn, where she could not imagine him to have any possible business to transact.

These ideas passed through her mind very rapidly; before she had time to

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consider them, as they were turning down an angle in the road, she perceived Osmond himself slowly walking from it; apparently buried in contemplation, for the carriage passed him, and he took no notice of it.

Lady Ellen had nearly betrayed her surprise by pronouncing his name, and calling Lady Jane's attention to him; but the whole thing passed so suddenly, and the carriage moved on so quick, that they left him far behind, before she had recovered from the strange confusion this incident produced in her reflections, sufficiently to reply to her companion's twice repeated inquiry of, "what is the matter?"

"The matter!" she replied: "oh, nothing—nothing is the matter;" for as the consideration of an instant had suf-

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ficed to show her, that whatever was Osmond's business at Hampstead, his method of proceeding, by leaving his servant at the inn, seemed to announce a desire of not being observed; she would not on any account expose him to Lady Jane's curiosity, which she doubted not her Ladyship would gratify, by sending the footman after him to desire his return, if she were aware of his being so near them.

"Well, I thought, to be sure, you saw something strange and wonderful, or were going into a fit, or taken with the cramp, or—"

"I had a slight spasm," said Lady Ellen, to shorten the surmises of Lady Jane by an acknowledgment not very far removed from the truth; and the carriage now stopping at the door of a

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lowly sort of dwelling, she was relieved from the further continuation of the subject, by finding they were arrived at the place where Lady Jane's children were at nurse.

The business of a mother on her Ladyship's part was very soon discussed. A few questions were hastily put to their attendant, and Lady Ellen's opinion asked as to "their improvement in health,—what could ail them?" and "whether her own child, about the age of the youngest, was altogether such a miserable looking thing?"

A smile of pity beamed over the features of Lady Ellen as she took the poor infant in her arms, and in the tenderest caresses evinced the overflowing compassion she felt for its deserted state.

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Lady Jane, who affected somewhat more indifference than she felt, was reproved by her tenderness, and as if she had read her thoughts, replied to them:

"Well, I really don't know what to do for them," said she; "I have hired this house, or the best part of it, for the whole season, at the Lord knows what a week, enough to ruin me, though."

Lady Ellen looked round upon the habitation; it was too humble to admit a hope of Lady Jane's having the credit of ruining herself in providing unnecessary luxuries for the accommodation of her children; but as she perceived that her silence was a kind of reflection which, though she internally felt, she had no right or intention to make known, she resigned the child to its nurse, and

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conceiving that Lady Jane had nothing, in fact, to say that required her presence, she begged, while her Ladyship was talking with her nurse-maid, that she might be allowed to take a few turns in a pretty small garden at the back of the house, alleging a wish to try and dissipate, by the air, the symptoms of an approaching head-ach.

"Oh by all means," replied her Ladyship; "and in the mean while, Tomkins, do see if you can find me any thing to eat," she continued, turning to the nurse, "for I came off in a hurry to escape Mrs. Howard, and forgot my luncheon."

"If you are disposed for such proceedings," she continued to Lady Ellen, who was just leaving the door, "you will know where to find me."

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Lady Ellen declined the proposal, and bent her steps into the garden. Her mind was the seat of disorder and agitation, and she laboured in vain to restore it to composure. She was ashamed of the ill defined, scarcely conscious emotions, that darted like a pang of bodily anguish through her breast; it was something like distrust of Osmond, that disturbed her so heavily, and made her sicken at the possibility of her becoming a jealous wife—of becoming all that man recoils from with little less than loathing.

"I will not—I *will* not be this mean, this poor, despicable being," she said. "What right—what ground have I for suspicion?—suspicion of whom?—of Osmond—of my husband! What, because I meet him under circumstances slight-

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ly singular, I must descend to act the character of a paltry—oh! I cannot, I will not doubt him, I have no cause—I *have* no cause," she repeated with energy, as if in assertion she could persuade herself she found truth.

She wandered down a gravel walk, at the end of which a woman was stooping down and gathering some herbs; and though her form, as she pursued her occupation, concealed a child that was speaking on the other side of her, from the sight of Lady Ellen, the sweet little infantine voice attracted her notice, and induced her to advance with a view of discovering from whom it came.

With the delight which children exhibit in catching a new sound, when they first begin to prattle, it was trying to repeat the word "*father!*" but blend-

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ing with it another appellation more familiar to its practice, it often substituted for that the woman desired it to utter, the name of "*mother*."

"Silly boy," she said with a laugh, "that is not what the gentleman taught you—now say after me, "*father*."

With much effort, and consideration, he at last brought out the word, with a little laugh of joy, at accomplishing so great a feat.

Lady Ellen was now close upon them, and the woman hearing the sound of footsteps, started up, and making a profound curtsey, was retiring with the child, who clung to her gown, awed into sudden silence at the sight of the stranger.

The surprise of all parties was something great; for Lady Ellen having

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glanced at the boy a few moments with admiration, was struck with a resemblance it was scarcely possible to overlook. Young as he was, seemingly not more than two years of age, every feature was the living portraiture of Osmond's! The dark eyes beaming through their long lashes, the aquiline nose, the mouth, the form of the face, the dark curling hair—

"Whose is—this child?" she was on the point of saying; but she paused, and sat down upon a bench that was near, trying, by condemning her emotions as absurd, to banish or subdue them; and changing her question into "Is this your child?" she gave a greater semblance of indifference to the inquiry.

"No, ma'am," replied the woman, again making an effort to go; but Lady

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Ellen motioned her to stay, and taking the boy upon her lap, she parted his pretty hair, and endeavoured by caresses to quiet his impatience to leave her.

"Poor thing, he's so used to me," said the woman, "he does not like to go to any body else; I don't know how, I'm sure, he came to be so good this morning to the stranger gentleman; it was for all the world as if he knew it was his father—though, poor dear, he never saw him before in his life."

The heart of Lady Ellen died within her! a sentiment of horror rushed through her veins—she turned pale and sick with anguish.

"I am afraid you are not well, ma'am!" said the woman, "shall I—"

"No—no—I shall be better presently; don't go"—and striving with all her

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might to repel the rising throb of passion, she asked, as calmly as she could, the name of the child.

"It is a very fine name, to be sure, ma'am, for such a poor boy—they have called him Osmond; but, dear me, ma'am, I am sure you are going to faint!—I—"

Lady Ellen laid her hand upon her arm, and now, incapable of concealing her distress, acknowledged that she felt unwell; "but do not call for assistance," said she, "I am subject to these attacks—it will go off. I am better, now," she continued, after a short interval, during which the woman had left her to bring a glass of water; "I am much better:" and she spoke the truth; for that sort of vigour and energy

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which supports the mind under injury had risen to her aid.

"You live here, do you?" she continued to the woman.

"Yes, ma'am," she replied, "this is our house; though we have now let off part of it for the summer. I generally take in children to nurse."

"This child lives with you, then, I suppose, or with his mother—does she live here?" She blushed at the faltering of her tongue as she asked the question.

"No, ma'am, his mother lives in London—but she is not likely to live long, any where, poor thing!"

"Is she ill, then?"

"Yes, ma'am, she is in a deep decline. It is a sad tale, her's, I dare say—poor thing!"

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The remembrance of Osmond's wretchedness, not only of the preceding night, but of former times—the hints he had then dropt of his being haunted with the tortures of remorse—the circumstances of this morning, all conspired to stamp conviction upon her mind—a conviction full of horror—that the fair fame—the virtue—the honour of her husband—all that constituted the pride and glory of her life, was departed.

Her fatal curiosity, too strongly excited to be at this time under the dominion of her judgment, prompted her to pursue her inquiries; but the pause of the woman, in her reply to the next question she put, reminded her that she was exceeding the limits of prudence, or of propriety.

"I beg your pardon," she said; "I

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do not desire to know—it is a subject—" she could not belie her feelings so much as to add, "of no interest to me."

"Oh, dear, ma'am," replied the woman, extremely well pleased, as are most of those in a low situation of life, with holding a conversation with their superiors, "I should have no objection to tell you in what part of London the boy's mother lives, if I knew—but I do not—I judge, by her coming only once a week, and that of a Sunday, that she is in some business."

"And the father!" said Lady Ellen, with uncontrollable impulse.

"There, ma'am, I am as much at a loss as you to say any thing; for as long as I have had the child to take care of, I never saw or heard of his father till to-day. His mother comes, as I

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told you, once a week to see him, but no one else, till this morning; and then came a fine, handsome gentleman, ma'am, as you shall see; and he desired to see a child I was taking care of, of the name of Osmond Lascelles."

"What name?" Lady Ellen faintly murmured, one hand supporting her head, whilst with the other she vainly strove to quiet the beating of her heart.

The woman repeated it. "And then, ma'am, he took him on his knee, and kissed him, over and over again; and he desired me to leave him with him—but the child would not be good without me, and so I staid—and indeed, ma'am, it would have made your heart ache to see him, getting up and walking away—and hiding his face, poor gentleman, that I might not see him cry;—I am sure,

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ma'am, it made me cry to see him, and to hear him calling him 'his poor boy,' 'his poor deserted boy;' and trying to teach him to call him 'father.'"

Lady Ellen sighed heavily—her heart did ache, indeed, with many woes—but pity for herself at this instant superseded every sentiment of compassion for Osmond.

"How long has he been gone?" she asked.

"Not long, ma'am; not half an hour, I dare say."

A gruff voice now summoned the woman with some alarm to the recollection of her husband, and his being waiting for his dinner. She was hastening away, but Lady Ellen detaining her a moment, seemed to have yet something more to say.

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That infatuation, which impels the mind when not repelled in its first advances to a painful subject, to linger over it with a species of fascination, hung over her; and though it was torture, little less than madness, that followed every word she heard, she knew not how to forego the deep and harrowing desire she had to know still more.

But the woman who had gratified her own inclinations in telling all she had to tell, finding that nothing followed the effort Lady Ellen made to speak, but that it died away, in an agonizing glance at the child, took him in her arms to carry him away.

Once more Lady Ellen attempted to utter something. The power of reason was subdued, but it was not extinguished; and a ray of it broke forth in a

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remembrance of the strange curiosity her emotion must be exciting.

She cast one more look upon the child—it sickened her to perceive his extraordinary resemblance to Osmond. "Take him away!" she said—but, despising the weakness which transferred any indignation upon so innocent a being—"stay," said she, drawing him towards her, and imprinting a kiss upon his cheek—"poor child!" she murmured—"there—now go!"—and she waved her hand to the woman, who took the signal and departed.

Left alone and unobserved, the first impulse of Lady Ellen's overcharged soul, would have been to cast herself prostrate upon the ground, and give vent to the torrent of anguish that overwhelmed her. But her present

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situation admitted not of this relief. Lady Jane she expected every instant would summon her to depart. All, therefore, that she could do to quell the tempest of her soul, she found was indispensable; for in the midst of the most stern and severe emotions he had ever excited, her tenderness for Osmond —her respect for him, made her shrink with recoil from the bare possibility of Lady Jane's discovering her distress.

"I shall have time enough for suffering—I shall have time enough for that," she said, as walking with unequal steps, —now rapid—now slow—partaking the character of the ideas that rushed upon her mind, she struggled with her tears; —"but to think of his treating me thus!—but I must not think—no, no—

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I must not,—no, no;" and then, as if divided with herself—as if she saw and pitied the grief she dared not indulge—she besought the forbearance of her own heart; "only a little time," she said—"only for a little while, and then I can weep unrestrained."

And then, amidst the train of passions which clamoured for indulgence, came hope, that fond deceiver, never waiting to retard the judgment, and enhance the difficulty of combating delusions.

"Was it so certain that this child belonged to Osmond—might he not be perfectly ignorant of its existence—what proof?"—Alas, these flattering suggestions died even in the instant of their birth, when the strong evidence of facts was so directly opposed to them. Not for an instant could she derive any con-

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solation in considering their probability. A train of circumstances had mysteriously led her to the knowledge of what must embitter every moment of her future life. One week since, and the sun did not shine upon a happier wife or mother!—Mother!—oh what pangs accompanied the idea hitherto so exquisite in bliss!—Her child—so dear to her—possessed but a divided share in his father's love!—His undoubted right to a parent's whole affection and tender care was disputed by another claim,—less lawful, but perhaps to Osmond—a far, far dearer one!"—and she recollected with anguish, how often she had grieved to fancy (for, after all, she would never admit it to be more than fancy, when Osmond laughed, and caressed away

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the surmise), that he did not love his child with that delight and pride it would have given her joy to see him entertain.

In the midst of this emotion, she was waited upon by Lady Jane's servant, to say, she was ready to return; and in a state of mental confusion and dismay, which mocks description, she found herself in a few minutes on the road to town, condemned to wear a countenance of composure, and to veil the wretchedness of her heart, in the semblance of tranquillity, whilst Lady Jane, always voluble, continued incessantly to harass her with conversation.

It was fortunate, that her Ladyship required little more in a companion than an auditor. Her faculties of observation, also,

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were never much upon the alert, when required to be exercised only upon her own sex. Lady Ellen had the good fortune, therefore, to escape any of her penetration, which, without being very piercing, might have discovered, in the deep and frequent sighs which unconsciously broke from the bosom of her companion, and the painful effort she was evidently making to force her thoughts from their current, a source of uneasiness, recent, and almost overpowering.

The time was come—that time so fatal when it occurs in the marriage state—the time when the absence of each other was a mutual relief both to Lady Ellen and her husband.

The only comfort, or, more justly to call it, the only alleviation of her miser

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presented itself to her, on her return home, in a recollection that Osmond would not dine with her on that day, having an engagement, and that she should thus escape him till she had decided upon the line of conduct, which, under this dreadful change of sentiment, she ought to adopt.

But what could she do?—Shew resentment for wrongs she understood so imperfectly?—Do what, in the course of her life, it was the sweetest of remembrances to think she had never done—accuse and judge, before she knew how far repentance ought to disarm accusation and soften judgment;—and be severe with him whom she had vowed at the altar, to take "for better and for worse!"—with him, whom, alas! it required no effort to forgive—for amidst

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the strongest pangs of nature, the love she bore to Osmond surmounted every other sentiment.

Oh, no—no;—this course of behaviour was repugnant alike to her reason and her affections.—Perhaps, and oh, how fondly did she cling to the suggestion, perhaps this mysterious affair, which caused her so much doubt and distress, might long since have been repented of by Osmond?—His going to see his child was an act of humanity—praiseworthy, rather than deserving of condemnation—surely—surely—it was!—and she paused to consider it in this new point of view, gathering consolation from every new light that broke in upon her.—His never having been before—his being a stranger to the sight of the child—a circumstance not likely

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to have occurred had he continued his connexion with its mother; the age of the boy, which acquitted him from having recently entered into this intrigue —"oh, I have been too impetuous!" she said, "I have judged him too hastily!"—and, in the overflowing of hope and returning confidence, she almost wished for his presence, to throw herself at his feet, and tell him all that she had surmised against him; and then he would soothe her, and alleviate his own sorrows, by revealing—ah—but would he—would he reveal this mysterious story?"—and a paroxysm of doubt again convulsed her with anguish—she thought with misery of his recoil from the advances she had already made to gain his confidence.

"That he would but trust in me!"

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she said—"that—*that* must be the test of my future happiness. Without it all must be destroyed—our delight in each other will be gone—our fair prospects blighted—all—all—gone.—Oh, my God—spare me this dreadful trial—oh, spare me the loss of Osmond's love!"—and on her knees, with uplifted eyes and moving lips, but from which no sounds but those of sorrow proceeded,—her heart pursued the supplication her tongue had not the power to utter.

The evening came, and found her more composed. She had considered of every thing; and the result of the whole was, her belief, that whatever had been the misconduct of Osmond relating to this affair, his dejection of spirits announced the sincerest repentance; and that her part, considered in the light of

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prudence or of affection, was to sacrifice every severe and selfish emotion, and to study by increased attention, and consideration for his faults, to retain his love, and acquire his confidence; to banish, as far as she could, every remembrance of the circumstances she had so accidentally been made acquainted with, and never, till Osmond led the way to it by an unsolicited confession, to let him imagine she knew aught against him.

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CHAP. IV.

Few persons, as we have before had occasion to remark, were more steady in adhering to their purposes than Lady Ellen; but she was now called to a trial far more severe than any she had yet experienced; and was destined most painfully to feel how terrible may be the conflict in the best regulated and subdued mind, when it is at war with the strongest passions of the human breast.

A month, unmarked by any confidence on the part of Osmond, passed

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away.—His general manner to her was kind—but she saw little of him—he was almost always from home.

Her endeavours to govern herself in her demeanour to him, by the resolution she had made of not betraying her knowledge of his misconduct, was not, indeed, wholly fruitless. Her natural steadiness of temper, aided by the assistance which her strong sense of religion gave to her efforts, enabled her to resist the pressure of impulses of resentment, of impatience, of all that thwarts and perplexes the understanding, with a heroism for which she paid dearly in her hours of solitude, when the necessity for restraint was removed; and when by the side of her baby's innocent and happy couch, she was at

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liberty to weep unnoticed. Then, indeed, there was no longer any struggle—no longer any opposition to grief—the cradle of her child was the receptacle of her tears—those tears which his father had caused to flow—those tears which no monitions of reason or hope could wipe away.

One evening, solitary, and in the depth of despondency, from perceiving, not only no advance to confidence on the part of Osmond, but in its stead a mysterious gloom, which increased daily, and which communicated to their intercourse a character of the most chilling reserve, she returned from watching the slumbers of her little boy, and Osmond being, as she imagined, engaged at the House, where he expected to be detained till a late

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hour, she went into the library, and with a view of compelling herself to try and fix her attention upon something foreign to her predominant ideas, she took down a book, and endeavoured to occupy her attention in perusing it. But it could not be—her dejection of spirits was on this evening peculiarly deep.—"My happiness is gone—gone for ever!"—was the only idea that presented itself. The book fell unnoticed from her hands — unconsciously her head dropped upon her arms as they reclined upon the table, and she sobbed, till nature, overpowered and exhausted, forgot her woes, and she insensibly fell asleep.

In this state of forgetfulness she was discovered by Osmond, who had broken away from the House at as early an

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hour as possible, and, agitated and anxious, with the expectation of meeting one long a stranger to his sight, but still too dear to be even thought of without emotion, he was about to repair to the place where he believed he should find her. Accidentally entering the library, on his return home previous to setting off, he was arrested in his purpose by the unexpected sight of his wife in his apartment.

The watchfulness of many an uneasy night, and the constant struggle she was maintaining with grief, had so completely worn her out, that sleep, having once usurped dominion over her, it became unusually heavy; and not even the abruptness with which Osmond entered the room, unconscious of her

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being there, had any power to disturb her.

His surprise that she should take no notice of his approach increased, when, advancing towards her, he pronounced her name, and still received no answer; but coming nearer, he perceived she was asleep, and so gentle, so calm, so suffering, but so resigned was the character of her slumber, that for many minutes he stood to gaze upon her with tenderness and admiration.

Her pale face rested upon an arm of marble fairness, but not more white than the cheek it pillowed; and down that cheek there were tears still falling, though the eyes from which they fell were closed. But for all that, she wept, there was something of a smile about

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the mouth—something that spoke of hope beyond this world! you would have said, "she suffers—but they are the sufferings of a saint."—Still nearer and nearer Osmond bent his face to her's—and then drew back, and contemplated her at a distance—and then he turned away, and sighed from the bottom of his soul—and then resumed his look of earnest interest.

"Gentlest—best of human beings," he said, "would to God I were more worthy of you—or that we had never—never met"—and as he spoke, he lightly, tremulously touched her cheek with his lips—but cautious as was the caress, it seemed to vibrate to her heart, she murmured some indistinct expression, and struggling for a moment with the drowsiness that was again stealing upon

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her, she started, and with an exclamation of pleased surprise, fixed her eyes upon Osmond.

"Is it you, love?" she said, rising and extending her hand.

He took it, and said something in a joking manner about having caught her napping—but his gaiety soon fled, and he seemed to be preparing to go out again directly.

The sudden sensation of pleasure with which the unlooked-for sight of him filled her heart, receded as she remarked the unusual gravity, not to say recoil of his manner;—not, indeed, that it was unusual for him to wear a countenance of care, for of late he had presented no other to her view; but to-night it struck her as peculiarly sad.

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And, in truth, it was so, for his soul was torn with remorse and indecision. He felt at this instant, as on the brink of a precipice; as yet he had not taken the fatal plunge, but another moment might behold him, lost to himself, and to her, for ever.

In this state of mental warfare, the unhappy irritation of his ungoverned temper returned to lead him to destruction. Ill at peace with himself, and believing that the struggle of his heart might almost be read in his countenance, he could not endure the searching glance with which, without speaking, Lady Ellen long continued to regard him.

It was indeed a penetrating glance—a glance before which his conscience internally shivered:—it was not severe—it was not reproachful—but it was deep,

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and warning; it spoke more plainly than the strongest language! "Osmond," it said, "you are deceiving me,—you are trifling with my affection—you are covering both yourself and me with dishonour—you are bringing disgrace and wretchedness upon us both."

Something of the same expression her features had of late worn; something that had imparted to him doubts and dissatisfaction; but his pride had caused him to disdain an inquiry into the meaning of it, knowing, as he did, that *as yet*, he merited it not. But this boast was now in danger of being lost; and now, therefore, it was, that her virtuous speaking eye had a power in it of piercing him through with apprehension and remorse. But his overbearing spirit revolted from the grovelling na-

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ture of the sensations that were stealing upon him.

To shrink before the glance of a woman, though that woman was a gentle, affectionate, and injured wife, he never could—he never would submit to.

"Better be the thing I am," he mentally exclaimed, with impatience indulged till it became almost savage, "better be the decided villain that nature made me, than thus halt between two opinions,"—letting

"I dare not wait upon I would;"

and as the thought passed through his mind, he threw his roquelaure over his shoulders, and merely saying, "I am going out, Ellen, good night!" he was hastening away; but she detained him.

She had not watched him so intensely—she, who knew the meaning of every

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turn, and every variation of that speaking face; she had not thus long dwelt in agonizing gaze upon it, without discovering that some peculiar source of agitation was warring within him; some temptation—some powerful impulse—something, in short, that grieved and tormented him.

Her hand convulsively grasped his, as she took it, to impede his design of leaving her; but words she could utter none, but "Osmond—my dear Osmond!" and then, wholly overpowered, she sunk upon his shoulder, and buried her face in his bosom.

"For God's sake, Ellen, what is the matter?" he exclaimed, really alarmed by a paroxysm of grief, for which, unless she were gifted with inspiration, and could read his thoughts, he was

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wholly at a loss to assign an adequate cause.

"What *is* the matter?" he repeated; but a slight suspicion of her not being wholly removed from the indulgence of female caprice and jealousy fettered the expression.

His words were not given in a tone that harmonized with the burst of feeling into which she had been betrayed. Had they been pronounced with one degree more of tenderness, she *could* have proceeded; she *could* have relieved her overcharged heart, by asking his confidence—she *could* have articulated the request, that now died away unuttered—she *could* have called upon him, as her husband—her dearest, best beloved of friends, to be ingenuous with her—to pour his sorrows or his faults into

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that bosom, which had no sentiment for him but one;—no remembrance—no thought—no passion but love! she *could* have done it—but Osmond's coldness froze her very heart; and she rose from his encircling arms, and turned away.

Osmond remained a few minutes, writhing with ten thousand different horrors. He was ashamed of the want of tenderness he exhibited; he was angry with his wife for being unhappy—he was angry with himself for having made her so—he was miserable beyond the power of language to describe.

While thus he stood, irresolute whether to go or stay, Lady Ellen, with a just sentiment of self-respect, was labouring to subdue her emotion sufficiently to speak with calmness.

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He watched her earnestly with stolen glances. He seemed as if he dared not to encounter either her words or looks; but still he hung upon her next address to him, for as soon as she spoke, he turned round with quickness to attend to her.

"You ask me what is the matter, Osmond," she said; "but, need you to ask me—need you—" she could not proceed.

In great distress, Osmond walked up and down the room; and, once more believing that she had conquered the rising pang, Lady Ellen, with less of tenderness, which, though still the predominant feeling of her gentle heart, she wished not, at the present moment, to indulge, again attempted to speak to

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him: but ere she had well uttered the words, "I once was happy—" the contrast of her present feelings with those to which she alluded wholly overpowered her, and sinking down upon her seat, from which, in the energy of speaking, she had risen, "I can say no more," she continued, "go to your engagement—go, and be happy—if you can."

She *was* human, though as little within the influence of anger or resentment as any created being. The germs of natural passion did exist within her, and this was one of the occasions in which her self-command and saint like patience failed her, and gave to her last words to Osmond a tone of petulance, as new as it was displeasing.

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He looked at her some time in silence, as if he would penetrate her inmost thoughts. Once or twice he seemed to be on the point of saying something, but the words died away unuttered. At last, as if his resolution was taken, without pronouncing a syllable, he rushed out of the room.

No sooner was he gone than Lady Ellen's *woman's heart* began its usual work of woe. She reproached herself for her petulance; "perhaps gentleness and soothing might have detained him. But she had tried both. She had tried to soothe him with caresses—to detain him with tears—and he had shrunk from them. She had done all she ought to do—surely she had—and if a slight burst of irritation had escaped her, it

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ought not to have been received with such proud indignation."

In fruitless reflections and vain regrets, now lamenting that she had betrayed so much of the state of her feelings, now sorry that she had not said more—now angry with herself, now with Osmond—but in every variation of thought bewailing, with bitterest tears, the fatal chance which had made her acquainted with her husband's faults, and which had thus of necessity imparted to her conduct to him a reserve and constraint that it was not in human nature to eradicate, however strong control might suppress it, and which threatened to undermine the whole fabric of their felicity,—in these racking meditations the greater part of her night was passed.

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As the morning dawned, a new source of sorrow gradually presented itself: Osmond had not yet returned home. Since their marriage his engagements had never been protracted to so late an hour—and the horror of having driven him from her, by an ill-judged display of fretfulness and irritation—the alarm she felt at the idea of being the first to begin a species of hostility, which, in such a disposition as Osmond's, was likely to lead through very swift gradations to absolute estrangement—now agitated her with fears for the future, still more oppressive than regrets for the past.

Imagination, that cruel foe to peace, presented to her a long vista of succeeding woes. She saw in Osmond the fashionable husband, unblushingly in-

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different, perhaps glorying in his neglect of her! In herself she pictured a melancholy, deserted wife, sharing the fate of many women in her own rank of life—but, alas! not sharing with them the callous heart—the cold, unfeeling mind—which alone could support the contempt of such a situation!

"And this is the state of ineffable joy my treacherous fancy dwelt upon with so much exultation!" she exclaimed. "Oh, might I not have foreseen that some alloy was mingled in those glittering visions, with which I suffered myself to be deluded? Had I no warning of the danger I was courting to my arms? Was there no "still small voice?" Oh, yes, there was—yes, in the hour I thought most happy—in the hour when Osmond asked my hand

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in marriage—something whispered me, "beware!"—Ah! who shall shun that warning voice unpunished?—who shall reject the internal monitor—the light which Heaven grants to illuminate our dangerous, devious path—and not lament as I do?"

The day, which had long been dawning, was now brightened by the beams of the rising sun. It was a soft, early summer's morning, and Lady Ellen, wearied with grief, rose from her sleepless bed, and having slightly dressed herself, sat down at the window to watch for Osmond's return.

She opened it, and the cool, refreshing breeze was grateful to her fevered frame. It overlooked the Green Park, in which every tree, the water, and the verdant ground, looked gay and charm-

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ing in the radiance of the sun. Little birds were dancing about, and twittering with excess of happiness.

Some beautiful plants and flowers which filled the window began to unclose their heads, and yield a stream of fragrance, that the passing gale brought with it, as it breathed upon her cheek.

It was a morning of unspeakable loveliness; it was a morning in which the innocent and the pious might have delighted to come forth, to luxuriate in the contemplation of their Maker's beautiful works. She remembered with tears "the days that were gone;"—those days, in which she, too, rose from her pillow, to offer up, amidst the charms of nature, the incense of a grateful and admiring heart. Those tranquil days, which dawned, perhaps, upon sorrow; but

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sorrow so chastened, so subdued, as, compared with her present tumultuous sufferings, wore an aspect to charm rather than repel. If sighs were then her portion, they were more the aspirations which virtue, conscious of imperfection, makes after sublimer joys, and higher hopes—soft regrets, that, beautiful as is the world, it contains not wherewith to satisfy the cravings of an immortal soul,—than like these emanations of anguish—these broken heavings of a wounded, and bleeding heart—the vestiges of "the storm that had gone over her soul."

"Oh, that I were as in months past, in the days when God preserved me!" was the idea which, in the words of the suffering patriarch, escaped her lips; "oh, that I were still in that peaceful

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dwelling, which I felt that I could never leave in safety! I knew that this city of dangers and temptations would be the tomb of my happiness. Alas!—why—why did I yield to my heart, and forsake the counsels of my reason?" she continued, reverting with the tautology of distress, to the error she began so distinctly to perceive she had committed, in giving up to the importunities of Osmond, the dictates of her better judgment, which, aware of his impetuous nature and undisciplined temper, so strongly warned her to pause in her acceptance of him.

But although this was the hour of triumphant reason, it was reason which had no power to subjugate her love for Osmond. It might, and did, too painfully point out to her the consequences

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of her mistakes; but it failed, as in these cases poor Reason ever does, to administer a remedy for the evils she detected:—

> Ah, if she lend not arms as well as rules,
> Whatever she name, than tell us we are fools?
> Teach us to mourn our nature, not to mend,—
> A sharp accuser—but a helpless friend.

Her mournful reflections were only interrupted by hearing St. James's clock strike the quarters, as time, too slow, and yet too fast, for the increasing apprehensiveness of her feelings, went on his inflexible way.

Her anxiety amounted to agony, when six, seven, eight o'clock struck—the servants began to move about the house, and nothing was yet heard of Osmond! She framed all manner of dangers into which he might have fallen

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He went from her in a temper disposed for quarrel, and, as he sometimes spent an evening at Brookes's, he might have engaged in some dispute at the gaming-table. Nothing of horrible or alarming, that excited fancy could suggest to torment her, but rose in rapid succession to her thoughts. Twenty times she was on the point of ringing the bell, to desire one of the servants to go to Brookes's and see if he were there; but the anger with which Osmond would receive such a proof of her anxiety for him, restrained her, and made her, with that sacred regard to his feelings which she never lost sight of, rather suffer the utmost wretchedness of suspense, than run the hazard of increasing the present painful estrangement of their situation, by seeming to be importunate.

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It was past nine in the morning, and she was walking in a paroxysm of misery up and down her dressing-room, when she heard a knock at the door. She flew to the landing-place, and looking over the balustrade, in the next moment she perceived Osmond enter the house.

She was running down with joy to greet him; but perceiving that he was ascending the staircase, she retreated to her dressing-room again.

He went into his library, the door of which she heard him not only shut, but lock with violence, as if suspecting the possibility of intrusion.

This impetuous action made the heart of Lady Ellen sink within her: it spoke to her so intelligibly, not only of continued and deep resentment, but of

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indifference and contempt for that anxiety, which he must well know his unusual conduct, in absenting himself so long from his own house, could not but excite; and which civility, if no stronger principle, called upon him to endeavour to remove, by some sort of explanation.

No explanation, however, was she destined to receive. The whole morning passed away, and Osmond still continued shut up in his library; and Lady Ellen, awed by his determined seclusion from venturing to approach him, strove to cheat herself into tranquillity, by representing to herself that, however suffering, she was not the offending party, in the strange disunion which had so unaccountably sprung up between them; for in whatever light Osmond might,

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at the moment, take her last address to him, it was impossible, without supposing him to be equally devoid of heart and understanding, to imagine he would brood over it, till he magnified it into an affront that merited such stubborn resentment.

"It was not *her* conduct that produced his," she assured herself: "no—she had that satisfaction, at least. It was with his own heart that Osmond had a quarrel, and in this uneasy state of self-dissatisfaction, all things wore to him an aspect of distaste—even her devoted love was becoming irksome to him. Yes—that wretched hour is come, she continued, breaking into a flood of tears, "when my attachment has lost its value! Henceforth I see there is no

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hope of confidence—no communion of soul; my days are to wear away in doubts and mistrust; I know myself injured, but I must be silent."

Tears were upon her cheeks, when Osmond entered her apartment.

Had he come with an air of sorrow, of returning kindness, of gentleness, or even of gravity, she felt as if she could in a moment have wiped them away, and met him with a genuine smile of forgiveness and delight; so truly was he the beloved of her heart, so truly did that heart yearn to be at peace with him, as the only state of feeling in which an instant of real comfort existed for her.

But no human being, tortured as she had been by him, could, unmoved by

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resentment, have witnessed the expression (assumed indeed, and with considerable effort, but that she knew not), the indication of cavalier indifference with which, carelessly approaching her, having just paid her the salutation of the day, he inquired whether they were not to dine at Lady Jane Howard's?

Lady Ellen, pretending to occupy herself in stooping for her work, waited till she had composed herself a little, and wiped away the traces of a sorrow, which it was not extraordinary she just now considered as unworthy of her.

"I believe so," she replied; "that is, you will, I suppose."

"You will not, then, I imagine?" said he.

"No—I am far from well, and shall

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beg to be excused," was her cold answer.

He looked at her with a gravity that was almost sternness, for nearly a minute. The traces of extreme grief were too visibly imprinted on her countenance to admit of his passing them over without remark, unless he wished to pass for something worse than indifferent to her.

"Is any thing particularly the matter," he said, "or—is it only"—he paused—"caprice" was the word he intended to have added, but it seemed little less than an insult to apply such a term to one who, he well knew, of all her sex, deserved it the least.

"I believe it is not of much importance what is the matter with me,"—

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and she turned away from his searching eye, with an air of offended dignity which she could not restrain.

He rose from the sofa on which he had seated himself by her side, and, without replying, was going to leave her; but ere he reached the door he changed his intention, and presenting to her a countenance in which passion was labouring for a victory over reason, till every feature was quivering with agony —"I have loved you, Lady Ellen," he said, "by Heaven I have valued and respected you, and believed that the world did not contain your equal in virtue and goodness; but my opinion may change—the unworthy suspicions of me which these fits of humour, and this coldness imply, may affect me; this resentment for nothing—"

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"For nothing?" she repeated!

"Yes—for nothing," he replied, impetuously; "for what can you accuse me of, to justify your present cold behaviour?"

"Of nothing more than treating me with contemptuous neglect," she replied, as calmly as she could; "for, certainly, Osmond, you must be aware that your absenting yourself, without alleging any cause, for so long a time from your own house, could not but excite apprehension and alarm, though, I believe," she added with a faint smile, that bespoke any thing but the composure she wished it to indicate, "I believe it was absurd on my part to give way to them."

Never was fury equal to that which Osmond testified at this remark, though

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he, like her, but even with less success, endeavoured to be calm.

"Before you deal in insinuations," said he, "you should understand well what ground you go upon. You would then, perhaps, blush for your surmises. It is possible, however strange and unlikely it may seem, that this night may have been passed by me in prayer and penitence;—in the bitterest remorse and anguish—it may have been a night of affliction to me beyond any thing of sorrow that I have yet experienced—for what—" he did not, could not stay to add the words "you know!" but in extreme emotion rushed out of the room; leaving Lady Ellen speechless with astonishment, and almost doubting whether he or herself were in the right possession of their senses.

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In vain she sat down to ponder over every word he had uttered, and every mysterious circumstance of his behaviour, and the strange particulars which she herself had become acquainted with; for though persuaded that they were all connected together, her imperfect knowledge of them rendered her incapable of gathering any information, or receiving any light from considering them, either individually or collectively. But of nothing else could she think—and having pursued her painful ideas, till her brain was bewildered, and she felt as if her senses were receding, she closed the whole with the mournful certainty, in which, alas, all her reveries had lately terminated, that, "she was very unhappy."

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CHAP. V.

In order to understand the mysterious conduct of Osmond, we must take a retrospective view of some of the incidents in our narrative, and revert to the circumstances in which we left Caroline Lascelles. It may be remembered that her relation Mrs. Allen, had, with unexpected kindness, promised to assist her through her difficulties, without any further solicitude on the part of Caroline.

This promise she strictly performed, by removing Caroline, in ample time to save her from the suspicions of her com-

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panions, to another part of the town, and providing her not only with necessaries, but with comforts. In due time the unfortunate girl became the mother of a son; and so endeared to her was the little unhappy being, by the circumstances of anxiety and distress which attended his appearance in this world of trouble, that it was with some difficulty, and the use of all manner of intreaties, and promises, and at last threats, that Mrs. Allen prevailed upon her to agree to being separated from him, when her health was sufficiently re-established to admit of her returning to St. James's Street.

With floods of tears, and heart-breaking sobs, the poor Caroline saw her precious child consigned to other arms; and, after having taken innumerable

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farewels, each of which was faithfully promised to be the final one, she at last tore herself away from him, comforted only by the assurance of Mrs. Allen that once a week, if not oftener, she should be allowed to visit him.

This business settled, she soon found, in her return to the establishment of her cousin, that her promise of working hard, to repay that excellent personage the kindness she had evinced, was by no means to be taken in the light of "words of course;" but was accepted, as the only recompense she had it in her power to offer.

The London season was then in its prime, and Mrs. Allen had incessant occupation for every individual in her house. At this Caroline did not repine in the slightest degree. She was too

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grateful for the services she had received, not to rejoice in an opportunity of repaying them, by every means in her power.

But with the deep sense she really entertained of the favours Mrs. Allen had heaped upon her, there was still mingled a sentiment of disapprobation of her generally rapacious disposition, which often made her reflect with astonishment upon the lengths she had gone to serve one so humble as herself, without one inquiry as to the way or the degree in which there was now, or at any future time, a chance of her being remunerated.

She had never put a single question to Caroline respecting her betrayer, or said, or done any thing in the whole affair but what was calculated to prove,

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that, as she had told her, "it was, indeed, the joy of her heart to see people happy and comfortable about her, and to do what she could to serve them."

Satisfactory as this conduct was to Caroline, there was still something in it which she could not understand; but, too happy in having found a friend, when a friend was so essentially necessary, she gave her thoughts wholly up to the new and exquisite feelings which accompanied every interview she had with her child, and which gilded the intervals of absence with fond hopes and sweet anticipations of seeing him still more improved, and still more like Osmond, when next they met.

More than a twelvemonth elapsed, and the health of Caroline was beginning to suffer from her intense and con-

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stant application to sedentary employment. Her spirits too had received a severe shock, from reading in the newspapers the marriage of Osmond. It was not that she had buoyed herself up with any expectations that he would ever renew his addresses to her—but hopes little understood, and impossible to be defined, had suggested to her the possibility of their meeting again; a circumstance, she assured herself, she only desired in the natural wish of securing to her boy the friend, to whose kindness and protection Nature had given him the strongest claims.

But now this desire of seeing Osmond gave way to very opposite feelings. It was not, perhaps, extraordinary, that suffering to such a degree as she had done from her connexion with him, some

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emotions of pride and resentment should make it a measure revolting in the extreme, to have to supplicate the assistance of a man who, it was evident, had wholly forgotten *her*—no, she would work still harder and harder, to please her cousin, and secure her kindness for her child—"and if my life and health be spared," she said, "oh, if my health be but spared, how thankfully shall I use it in his service!"

But, alas! in vain was the supplicatory hope! Her delicate form was daily wasting away—the hectic spot upon the languid cheek became brighter and brighter; the work she was engaged in often fell, from extreme debility, from the trembling fingers; and though months passed away, and she still was found patient at her constant employ-

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ment, it was because she *would* not, rather than that she had not occasion enough to complain. Her visible decline at length alarmed Mrs. Allen, whose interest in her labours made her anxious to see her health and strength re-established—and as every thing that worthy woman did, was, by her own account, from motives of the purest benevolence, she one day told Caroline that it grieved her heart to see her so poorly and low; and greatly as it would inconvenience her to part with her at the present moment, she would willingly make any sacrifice for her benefit; she thought, therefore, she could not do better than go to Hampstead, where her boy was at nurse, and spend a fortnight or three weeks with him, for the benefit of change of air.

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No proposition could have been more delightful to Caroline, and but one objection impeded her acceptance of it. It was her utter incapability of supporting herself for so long a time, without the aid of Mrs. Allen, which having already so much trespassed upon, she did not wish to encroach upon any further. She therefore declined it, saying, she hoped to be better soon. But Mrs. Allen still urging the measure, she was at last compelled to say, "she could not afford it."

Hereupon Mrs. Allen, conceiving her cousin Carry to be deceiving either her or herself—rather more abruptly than Caroline liked, suggested to her that "she was very absurd."

"I am sure, Carry, I should never

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have named his name to you," she continued, "but you really force me to it, when you pretend that Mr. Greville would not gladly,—"

"Mr. Greville!" Caroline interrupted her by repeating, in a voice of the utmost astonishment, which, being, as Mrs. Allen imagined, assumed for the purpose of misleading her, when the time, as she thought, had long been come in which her cousin ought to have been candid, roused her utmost indignation, and impelled her to do, what people in a passion are very apt to do, to say a great deal more than she wished to say.

"Yes, Mr. Greville!" she replied; "why surely, Carry, you must take me for a fool, to think I would spend my substance in maintaining your little base-

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born brat, without knowing who I was to look to for being repaid!"

"You have not been applying to Mr. Greville!" said Caroline, in a tone of agony—laying her hand upon her arm; "for mercy's sake do not tell me that you have. Good God! what shall I do? what shall I do?"—and bursting into tears, the poor girl sat down upon a chair, overpowered with shame and wretchedness, as in an instant her mind recalled the generous offers of her preserver—the great probability that, unknown to her, he might have repeated them to Mrs. Allen before he left the house on the day he called upon her—the certainty that Mrs. Allen would accept them—the supposition that would naturally follow in her mind! Every idea that came across her, spoke of the

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painful conviction that it was to Mr. Greville's assistance, so improperly, so coarsely accepted by her relation, that she was indebted; and she sobbed with misery, till Mrs. Allen's heart relented, and she began to see, not the impropriety of the steps she had taken (for to her imagination there never could be any impropriety in taking money when it was offered), but the error of which she had been guilty, in removing from Caroline's mind the sense of obligation it had retained towards her, and which had influenced her in a manner so serviceable to her own particular interest.

"I am sure, Carry," said she, "if I thought it had been disagreeable to you, I would never have accepted Mr. Greville's offers."

"Oh, pray do not speak of it," said

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the still sobbing Caroline; "only let me know, truly and speedily, the amount of my debt to him, and I will write home to my father."

"Pooh—pooh! silly girl; you really are too ridiculous," said Mrs. Allen, again relapsing into anger at what she still believed to be duplicity. "You cannot pretend to make me think that Mr. Greville would have been so generous, if—"

"I can, and do declare, as solemnly as I hope for mercy," exclaimed Caroline, "that I had no claim whatever upon the generosity of Mr. Greville!"

Her earnestness somewhat astonished Mrs. Allen, in whose mind Caroline's unhappy story had never borne the least appearance of mystery, since one morning, only a day previous to Caro-

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line's own communication to her, she was visited by an elderly gentleman, who, having inquired if her name was Allen, and if she had not a young relation of the name of Lascelles then residing with her, proceeded in a very few words to unfold his business.

It is unnecessary to say that this was Mr. Greville, who, in the benevolence of his heart, had not felt quite easy respecting Caroline, though she had given him a promise of opening her sorrows to her relation, and requesting her assistance. He felt that natural interest in this young and unfortunate creature, which, in the breast of a man of humane feelings, would spring up for the being he had saved from destruction; and as he was solitary, and had little to love or to serve besides

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himself, it occurred to him that his purse might be essentially useful in the behalf of Caroline. He had seen already enough of her to discover that she possessed the delicacy of mind which shrinks from owning obligation of a pecuniary kind; and this morbid feeling, under her circumstances, probably improperly indulged, might be the means of still further increasing the distress, which apparently was heavy enough without any addition.

He determined, after a day's consideration, to call upon Mrs. Allen herself; and, supposing that Caroline would have made the communication she promised him to make, endeavour to ensure for her the assistance of her relative, by desiring that *his* aid might be sought, in case her sorrow was of a description to require it.

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But finding, from Mrs. Allen's answers to his guarded questions, that Caroline had as yet been silent, he merely specified his name and address, acknowledged a slight acquaintance with Miss Lascelles, and a knowledge of her being then oppressed with some source of uneasiness, which she had promised him to confide to her relation: he concluded with expressing a sincere interest in her welfare, which induced him to desire, that if her case, when communicated to Mrs. Allen, required pecuniary assistance, he might be applied to, with a dependance upon receiving it. He added a desire that this application might not be made known to Miss Lascelles.

He then took his leave, and Mrs. Allen, after the first emotion of asto-

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nishment was over, went about her usual occupations, contented to wait for Caroline's communication with all the patience which characterizes persons engaged in sufficient business of their own, to leave them neither leisure nor inclination for that of others. Besides this, her acquaintance with London life, and two or three similar accidents that had occurred under her own observation, made her as certain of what she was to hear, as if it had already been told.

When, therefore, Caroline, hesitating and faltering, on the following day began her dreaded disclosure, the great comfort Mrs. Allen derived from the recollection of Mr. Greville's promises enabled her to act as we have related, and with a resolution to apply immediately for the assistance he had promised; she

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had no difficulty in pouring forth a profusion of the most generous assurances, for the consolation of Caroline.

She failed not very speedily to avail herself of the address Mr. Greville had left with her; telling him, in the letter she addressed to him, as much of Caroline's story as had been revealed to her: though she believed such a communication was somewhat of a joke, as she had no doubt Mr. Greville was able to tell her much more than she imparted to him; but that, she wisely considered, was no concern of hers. In all these cases, the least that was said the better. If Mr. Greville chose to pass merely for the friend of Caroline, and desired to have his name concealed, her part was, to be discreet; and so long as there was any responsible person for *her* to

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look to, she had nothing to do but to be quiet.

Mr. Greville's reply confirmed, and pointed out the express manner in which he designed to serve the child of Caroline, and Mrs. Allen was accordingly made completely easy upon the subject.

There were times, to be sure, when she was a little puzzled to account for Caroline's warm expressions of gratitude to herself; supposing, as she did, that although the name of Mr. Greville was never uttered between them, it was perfectly well understood by both that he was the real benefactor. However, as people seldom find much difficulty in awarding the full measure of merit to their good actions, Mrs. Allen recon-

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ciled Caroline's grateful acknowledgments by agreeing with her in opinion; and, on reviewing her part of the transaction, taking much satisfaction to herself, in reflecting upon the essential benefit her friendship had afforded her.

Now that the mistake which had operated to render her so disinterested was cleared up, and Caroline's solemn declaration left her without any subterfuge for continuing the application she had been allowed, and had never failed to make, upon Mr. Greville's bounty, her tone of kindness was decidedly changed, especially when she found Caroline determined upon pursuing her intention of writing home for money, to repay the obligations Mrs. Allen had incurred on her account.

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A long and unpleasant dialogue ensued between them; Mrs. Allen accusing Caroline of duplicity, in misleading her—of folly, in not availing herself of Mr. Greville's offered friendship as long as he was disposed to grant it—and finding every species of language equally useless, in prevailing upon her either to disclose the name of her seducer, or to agree to let things remain in the state they had been, she proceeded to a last resource in administering a threat. Indeed it was a threat, which, in the altered state of things, she conceived it very likely she should put in execution—for perceiving that, far from having steered clear of difficulties, and, at no expense to herself, reaped the credit of having acted a noble and friendly part, she had, in fact, involved herself in a very

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troublesome business, Mrs. Allen was suddenly visited with a great deal of virtuous repentance, for ever having suffered the liberality of her affectionate heart to involve her in such a disgraceful affair. "It never had been reconciled to her conscience," she told Caroline, "and, therefore, to pacify the remorse she felt, and to save her cousin Carry from further ill conduct, she would make an atonement, by a full disclosure of all she knew of the transaction to the injured and deceived Mr Lascelles."

She found this was the only chord to touch upon with effect. The horror of inflicting such distress and shame upon her dear and respectable family overpowered every other feeling; and while her heart recoiled from asking any thing

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like an obligation of a woman, whose real and despicable character this conversation had so wholly revealed, the poor Caroline, trembling and supplicating, threw herself at her feet, and, with scarcely articulate accents, implored her forbearance.

"You shall not suffer," she exclaimed;—"I will apply to—I will write—" then, not knowing, in her bewildered mind, what she intended to do, she could only add—"wait one week, my dear, dear Mrs. Allen—do not destroy me quite!—There is one capable of assisting me—it is worse than death to me to have to ask his assistance—but I will do it, if it will please you—and if you cannot help me, a little longer—"

Mrs. Allen, a little softened, poured forth, as usual, assurances of the benevo-

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lance of her heart—goodnature and pity being her leading foibles, &c., and a recollection having come to her mind of the great use she found in Caroline's services, she left her with a promise of not disclosing the affair to her father, *provided* that Caroline did as she had suggested, and as she clearly ought to do, in applying to the person whom she acknowledged to be capable of assisting her.

That night Caroline passed in writing two letters—the fruit of sorrowful and anxious meditation.

One was to Mr. Greville, who had furnished her, on the day he had an interview with her at Mrs. Allen's with the means of applying to him by leaving an address, which he told her would always find him.

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Very little reflection had sufficed to shew her the impossibility of requesting such a sum as would liquidate her debt to this generous man, without awaking some suspicions in her father's mind of imprudence on her side: and, independently of this consideration, she shrunk from making any demands upon his limited income, sufficiently taxed already by the claims of his growing family.

She could only, therefore, express in her simple, but sincere language, the deep shame and regret she felt that the liberality of Mr. Greville had been so largely encroached upon—assure him that it was, till that moment, a circumstance unknown to her,—and with heart-felt gratitude for the assistance he had already rendered her, request him to spare

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her the humiliation of continuing it, in its present shape.

The other letter was not so quickly dispatched. It was to be addressed to one, whose idea called back associations of the most varied character. It was the remembrance of him who had breathed at her feet his first fond vows of love —of him who had won her virgin heart —of him who had, in the sight of heaven, plighted himself to her as her husband —of him whom she had once disdained and renounced, but afterwards recalled to love him—as the father of her child —whom she had sought in tears—but sought in vain—and now he, in his turn, had renounced *her*—had forgotten, perhaps, her very name. How was this being, once so near and dear, but now

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by fate and fortune so estranged—how was he to be approached—distantly, or affectionately?—Alas! she knew not—but approached he must be—for again, she was friendless, but for him.

It was in vain she pondered over her paper, incapable of tracing upon it a single line. Reflections served but to embarrass and perplex her;—so, at last, trusting to nature as her only guide, she gave vent, in the following effusion, to every rising thought, as it suggested itself—careless of any thing but relieving the sorrows of her breaking heart.

"So many strange and unhappy events have befallen me since last we met, Osmond, and they have sunk me in such deep distress, that I hesitate to introduce, even to *your* notice, a name

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so fallen from what it was, when first you became acquainted with it.

"But misfortunes are pressing hard upon me; and I am not living now with my kind parents, in my dear native village, but here in this great town;—but I shall not tell you where, for it is not for myself that I want your kindness, but for another, of whom I shall soon speak—though I don't think I should have brought myself to speak of him to you, if I had been able to support him any longer; but my health is declining, and I know that I cannot look for long life—for my heart is breaking;—and though grief is very slow in destroying, it is very sure; and, indeed, if I could hope to be forgiven for my sins, I should not grieve to die, but rather rejoice; only

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that I have such a very, *very* strong tie to bind me to the love of life. You will suppose, perhaps, that I am thinking of my dearest father, who was always so kind and good—and very dear he is to me, and ever will be, as long as life is lent me; but I have now something still dearer to me than even my father! —Oh Osmond! how shall I tell you—but I must tell you—and I hope, and trust, and pray, that you will be kind to him, and love him—for he is your's as well as mine. You left me, Osmond, to such distress!—but you did not know it —and I do not accuse you.

You would not have left England—at least, not till you had seen, and advised me, if you had known that you were leaving me desolate and poor, and almost friendless—to the sad prospect

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of becoming a mother. I am sure, if you had known this, you would have been tender and affectionate to me, my dear Osmond—for, with all your faults, you always had a kind heart. But when I wrote to tell you this, and, receiving no answer, went to seek you in person, you were gone abroad. Oh, when I heard this, what despair took hold of me! —but the Almighty was merciful, and saved me from destruction—and supported me through all my calamity.

"It is now more than two years since I became the mother of the sweetest boy that ever lived; and since that time I have been struggling with innumerable difficulties for his support;—for it was my pride and comfort, Osmond, to owe no obligations to any one for his maintenance—and perhaps this was

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sinful pride in me, and therefore it was frustrated—for it has been frustrated—but of that I cannot speak now.

"I feel my strength unequal to the exertions I would gladly make for my dear baby—and so, Osmond, at last, I must come to you, as a suppliant in his behalf—but not for myself. Do not think about me—forget *me*;—but if ever I was dear to you, be kind to my darling child. Perhaps you would like to see him—it would give me great joy that you should—for I am sure you could not see him without loving him. —You will find him at Hampstead, with one Mrs. Smith, who lives not far from the inn on the heath. Any body can tell you her house, as she is well known. You must ask for him by the name of Osmond Lascelles:—and God

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grant he may be but half as dear to you as he is to me.

"I hope you will forgive this application. I am aware that times are altered—and that you are now distinguished in the world—and married to a great lady—and have perhaps forgotten that you ever knew me. Heaven forbid that I should interfere to disturb you in any shape! That I will never do—I repeat to you, Osmond, it is not for myself, but to ensure a friend for my child, that I once more call your attention to the unfortunate

"CAROLINE."

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CHAP. VI.

It was this letter which had been delivered to Osmond, just as he was preparing to attend his wife to the opera.

The hand-writing awoke suspicions, which the first glance he cast upon the seal confirmed: it was one which he himself had given to Caroline, and he recognized it immediately.

The agitation and remorse which followed his perusing this communication, have already been disclosed.

It has been seen, also, that he lost no time in complying with the wish of his

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unhappy, and still dear Caroline, in visiting his child.

The woman who had the care of him had not exaggerated in her statement to Lady Ellen, when she represented herself as so deeply moved, by the agony of feeling with which Osmond greeted the first sight of his unfortunate little son.

The beauty of the boy was of itself sufficient to excite an interest; but the associations combined with his appearance were of a nature almost overwhelming, to a mind so intense in its emotions as Osmond's.

In a moment it hurried over the scenes of sorrow, through which the dear deserted girl he once had loved so fondly must have struggled for the bare subsistence of this little creature. He

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thought of the zealous care and watchful attention with which, from the hour of his birth, his legitimate offspring had been nursed—the anxiety that was incessantly bestowed upon his comfort—the numerous attendants, that were ready night and day to administer to all his little wants and wishes—whilst only one,—a fair, helpless girl—herself scarcely past the age of childhood—had shielded the infancy of this poor boy from utter neglect, and worked with her own hands to feed and clothe him! "Yes, even these mean habiliments," he thought, "these were bought with labour and difficulty!" and, with tears streaming from his eyes, he contrasted the lace and cambric which adorned his other child, with the clean but coarse little coloured frock, just serving to guard

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him from the weather and no more, in which this hapless being was clad.

"Oh, my poor deserted boy!" said Osmond—"my dear, dear boy!—I will never forsake you as long as I live!—and clasping him to his breast, he gave vent to a burst of sorrow which would not be restrained; till the cries of the frightened child compelled him to release him from his ardent embrace,—and then walking up and down the room—now pausing to look upon him with smiles—to take him in his arms—and, with more gentle caresses, to try and win his little heart to love him—and to teach him to call him his "father"—and then breaking away with a fresh burst of anguish, it was thus that a long interval after their meeting passed.

But as these feelings melted into

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more temperate emotions, Osmond's interest in the son, yielded in some degree to his anxiety to learn tidings of the mother.

He poured forth the most anxious inquiries, some of which Mrs. Smith could answer; but to his impatient questions as to her present residence he could obtain no satisfactory information. She could only tell the place to which she was directed by Mrs. Allen, when the child was entrusted to her care, to address any communications it might be necessary for her to make respecting him; but this place, she told him, she was well aware was not the abode of the boy's mother, nor had she the slightest clue to make him better acquainted with it.

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She comforted him, however, with an assurance that a letter addressed to this place would not fail of being duly received. She held out to him, also, confident hopes, that if he visited the little boy on the following Sunday, in the afternoon, he would in all probability find his mother with him, as on that day she seldom failed to come to Hampstead.

But to wait for this chance was not according to the character of Osmond! Caroline must be seen immediately, to receive his repentance and remorse—to hear his vows of protection to the child—to accord him her forgiveness—he must—he would see her, without delay. In this determination he returned to town; and had no sooner alighted from

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his horse than he proceeded to the post-office in Bond Street, where Mrs. Smith's letters were left for A. B.

But here he gained no light whatever. They knew nothing whatever of A. B., but that letters were occasionally left there for such a person, which were called for. His only measure then was to write to Caroline, which he did. It was a letter flowing from his heart—evincing, in the energetic language of truth itself, the deep and sincere feelings of affection for her, and for his child, which assuredly filled his soul. He took upon himself from that moment the responsibility of maintaining him, and added a promise of going constantly to see him: but it was of herself that Osmond the most eloquently spoke. He besought her by all the tenderness

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of their past intercourse, to grant him but one more interview—*but one!*—He bound himself by the most solemn assurances to ask no more than one interview, if she restricted him to it; but once more to behold her, was essential to his happiness—and she must not, she could not have the heart to deny it him. He urged it by every plea that his impetuous, ardent spirit could suggest, and having, as he believed, by his impassioned eloquence, secured her compliance, he left the letter for her at the post-office.

But, had she possessed the inclination, the power to yield to his intreaties was not left her: for at the moment of receiving his letter, Caroline, exhausted and overpowered with increasing illness, kept her bed; and not till a week from

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receiving it had elapsed, was she able to write him a line in acknowledgment of her delight in his promise in behalf of the child. To his request she returned a mild, but decided negative. Her present incapability of leaving her apartment furnished her with a sufficient excuse. It was not that her heart did not still turn with tenderness to the remembrance of him who was once so dear: but Caroline, though erring, had been nursed in habits of virtue, which would not permit her deliberately to risk the hazard of renewing an intercourse, which, in Osmond's present circumstances, could not be contemplated but as fraught with impropriety, however divested of actual guilt.

For nearly a month, during which

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time she was incapable of leaving her room, he continued his applications to her, sometimes changing his intreaties to see her, into a simple request that she would inform him of her place of residence; but to every species of importunity Caroline was steadily opposed, till fate accomplished his wishes, in a manner too melancholy to make their interview any thing but a meeting of exquisite sorrow; thus fulfilling that moral lesson which so often accompanies the gratification of improper desires.

Some public affairs of importance had prevented Osmond for more than a week from taking his now favourite ride to Hampstead, which he usually did at least twice in a week or oftener;

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for his growing interest and delight in the little boy rendered it an object to be reckoned upon to visit him.

It was one morning after this interval of unusual absence that he repaired there, and found to his great distress that the poor child had sickened of the measles, and was then in a state of so much danger, that Mrs. Smith was on the point of sending for his mother; but "she feared," she said, "that the poor thing would not be able to come, as she had said in her last note to her, that she was, though better, still unable to leave her room."

Osmond promised himself to communicate the intelligence of the child's illness; and after having dispatched the woman for the best medical advice which the place afforded, and seen the poor

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child surrounded with every thing calculated to facilitate his recovery, he rode back to town, and dispatched immediately to Caroline a guarded, but still sufficiently just statement of the boy's illness, to awaken her to a sense of his danger: a sentiment which he trusted would, if her health permitted, send her speedily down to Hampstead, to watch over his sick bed.

It was with the long indulged and anxious expectation of finding Caroline there, that, previous to himself setting off to visit the child again in the evening, he happened accidentally to encounter Lady Ellen in the library, the particulars of which interview have already been detailed to the reader.

We must proceed, therefore, with Osmond—the impetuous, anxious, trem-

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bling Osmond to Hampstead, whither, upon rushing so impatiently from the presence of his wife, he instantly repaired.

The indecision which remorse, and the consciousness of unjust conduct towards Lady Ellen, excited, vanished before the fond idea, the only one his fancy now dwelt upon—"he should see her perhaps again, his long lost Caroline—the first, the dearest object of his early love—he should see her again!"

"Is she here?" was his breathless question, as soon as he entered the house of Mrs. Smith; but not waiting for an answer, he hastened on to the apartment of the child,—and there he beheld her! not smiling in beauty—not turning upon him those beaming

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eyes of melting loveliness, whose slight glance had power to charm—but on her knees, by the side of her child's sick bed, holding one little burning hand in both her own—and bending upon it a face suffused with tears.

So entirely was she rapt in grief, that Osmond approached her unobserved. He checked the impulse which would have caught her to his heart—for her sorrow touched her with something almost sacred! It was sorrow for her dying child—for turning his eyes upon the countenance of the little sufferer, he saw that all was nearly over, and that he had arrived but to witness the peaceful parting of an infant's spotless soul!—But it was his own—his darling boy—the child of love, though born

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in bitterness,"—who was struggling with these pangs, awful and affecting enough, in any case, but peculiarly moving, when suffered by an unconscious child. The aged depart—for the good fight is fought—the work is done; the weary spirit, panting after rest, finds it, and is satisfied—death is its natural close—and the survivor's heart is comforted;—but the babe, just dawning upon existence, seems to have so many claims on life!—nothing is yet done, or suffered, or enjoyed—the mourning parents feel as if they *could not* part with it; "not yet—not yet!" they cry. But blind and inconsiderate, weep not over your infant's tomb! for who, when years have brought with them their inevitable train of sins and sorrows, who ever looked upon the little grassy hil-

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look that covers the remains of innocence, nor envied the happy sleeper? nor sighed to think that he, who then looks upon it, is spared to pay the dreadful penalty of nature, when every faculty of the soul is matured to understand the full horrors of the fate through which it is destined to pass?

In vain Osmond raised to Heaven an eye of supplication, and then cast it in despairing gaze upon his poor boy. He looked to hope, if any hope were left: but there was none—the last sigh was quivering on his pale lip—the last struggle was convulsing his gentle breast.

In this conviction, a groan of anguish broke from the bosom of the father, mingled with the name of "Caroline! dearest!"—he could say no more.

She raised her head—she extended

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her in vain—for nature would not—could not resist. In such an hour as this, who but Osmond—who but the father of her child—could speak to her of consolation!

He took her to his bosom, and mingled his tears with her's—but fruitless was every endeavour he made to speak with coherence.

"Is it thus we meet, my love?" at last he said; "is it thus?—But be comforted, my Caroline—our child is far happier than we are."

"I am content to part with him, Osmond," she replied; "he goes from me as sinless as he came—pure and unoffending—and whilst his innocent heart was free from sorrow—and he is happy—and I am—" Alas! the word was lost in anguish.

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"You are mine—my best beloved," he said, again and again folding her to his bosom; "for all your past sorrow—for this distress—accept the all that I can give you of consolation—accept my tears—my prayers—accept the penitence of my devoted heart."—He could not proceed—nor was there any need—the agony that broke from his manly breast betokened the sincerity of his remorse for her sufferings.

She pressed his hand to her lips, as a pledge of her pardon and her love—then breaking into a fresh flood of tears, she turned from him to hend her face upon that of the dying child, and to cover it with kisses. In vain Osmond endeavoured to remove her from this heart-rending spectacle.

"I must pray for him," she said,

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casting herself upon her knees by the side of the bed—"I must pray that his mother's sins be not visited upon his innocent head. I must pray, too, for myself—that the Almighty will support me in this heavy dispensation."

Inexpressibly affected, Osmond involuntarily sunk down by her side, and whilst his head was bowed down upon his clasped hands, his heart, in unison with her's, ascended in supplication to his Maker for the eternal happiness of his boy, and for the pardon of his own manifold transgressions. The sins and offences of his youth came to his remembrance at this awful moment; truly might he be said "to commune with his heart, and to be still."

While thus solemnly and devoutly engaged, the deep and painful respira-

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tion of the poor babe gradually became fainter and fainter—it stopped—it was heard no more.—Osmond bore the weeping Caroline from the room. Too deeply did he share in her sorrow, to talk to her of comfort;—but his tenderness and pity every moment breaking forth in the fondest, the most fervent ejaculations for the mercy of Heaven upon her afflictions—his prayers and his grief—in these tokens of his attachment there was something of an alleviation to her woes—Insensibly she detained him—insensibly Osmond remained—and the whole of that mournful night had passed away before the tears of either of them had ceased, and before the recollection of their mutual circumstances compelled them to a transient separation.

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CHAP. VII.

It was, as Osmond had insinuated to Lady Ellen, after a night of deep remorse and anguish of soul, that he returned from the death-bed of his child to his own house.

The impossibility that she should form the slightest surmise of the mournful manner in which his night had passed, was a consideration which ought to have sufficed to calm the irritability with which he found himself the object of unpleasant, and certainly, in the present instance, somewhat unjust suspi-

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cions on her Ladyship's side. Every thing, indeed, unfortunately combined at this time to augment the fatal estrangement between them.

Lady Ellen, too certain that she did not possess her husband's confidence, and feeling that she had made every endeavour, which not only duty, but the most fervent attachment could suggest to win it, and secure his affection, was fast sinking into a state of despondency, which, while her whole heart and soul were still as much as ever devotedly his, and his alone, imparted to her conduct a cold dignity, equally repelling and imprudent.

He had now discovered the abode of Caroline, who, in the depth of her affliction at the loss of her child, had

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been prevailed upon, imprudently it must be confessed, but naturally enough, to allow him to visit her at Mrs. Allen's.

As there were few people of distinction whose persons and names were unknown to that good woman, Caroline soon found that her real deceiver was rather more than suspected by her. She, therefore, at Osmond's instigation, acknowledged as much of their mutual acquaintance, as made Mrs. Allen extremely willing to admit him as a visitor to her cousin in her distress; for having arrived, at last, at the right reading of the story, she had no more misgivings of conscience, but resumed all her former interest in Caroline's welfare; never being angry with her now, but when she found her disposed to injure her still feeble and declining health, by renew-

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ing her labours in her service: a circumstance, she told her, she never would permit; the reason for which determination she did not allege, as she knew enough of Caroline's disposition to expect her vehement opposition to the measures which Osmond had taken with Mrs. Allen, to render her future application to business unnecessary.

The beauty of Caroline, though no longer bright or blooming, had gained rather than lost in its power over the heart of Osmond. Her affliction for the death of the little being, whose early sorrows and interesting fate had endeared him to her far beyond all else that the world could offer her—her delicate and fading health—her pensive tenderness, alike the offspring of remorse and affection—imparted to her

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native charms, a grace and attraction that was almost saintly.

Often did Osmond, as he gazed upon her, in her tears and gentleness, wonder at the furious passions which had embittered so many hours of their past intercourse. Now that no sprightly animation—no captivating gaiety—no dangerous rival remained, to awaken his tempestuous soul to those jealous torments which had once distracted it, his conduct to her was so uniformly kind and affectionate—guided by so much consideration for her comfort and peace of mind—that, forlorn and suffering as she was—friendless, and distant from all her natural protectors, with much to mourn over, and nothing but Osmond to love—however to be lamented and condemned, was it much to be wondered

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at, that this unhappy girl, weeping and repentant—yes, even in her relapse from virtue, filled with the agony of a bitter and reproachful spirit, suffered herself to be prevailed upon by Osmond, with the connivance of Mrs. Allen, to remove from her present abode, to lodgings he provided for her at Brompton!

Her health was the plea he urged to influence her to adopt this measure.

"Then is it not to my father that I should return, Osmond?" she said, averting from his too eloquent countenance her streaming eyes. "Death, perhaps, is hovering over me; should I not then arise and go to my father, that I may die in peace?"

The arguments of Osmond in reply we must spare to repeat. Over this period of our story we would fain be

brief; for to tell of a falling back from good resolve is ever painful to tell; also, of the gradations by which the restless, unquiet spirit of Osmond, oppressed with a heavy sense of misconduct, passed to a state of continued gloom and severity at home with Lady Ellen, and of dejection, and occasional sternness, when absent from it with Caroline, would be a task of ill-requited toil.

No where could he find peace—for no where could he fly from that internal monitor, whose goadings were ever working in his breast. The intercourse between him and his wife had sunk into a mere interchange of cold civilities; and whilst the unfortunate Lady Ellen felt the distress that had fallen upon her, with an anguish that seemed to rive her

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very heart asunder, her deep and just sense of injury supported her in his presence, and enabled her to maintain towards him a deportment, whose very calmness was a source to him of the most galling irritation. She compelled herself to enter into gaieties, and to accept every invitation that occurred. In different assemblies, she and her husband met, as other husbands and wives of the same rank, meet; and none, amongst the brilliant crowd in which they mingled, discerned the canker that was eating up the hearts of both.

"I shall have time enough for tears on my pillow," was now the usual assurance with which Lady Ellen, on these occasions, soothed to peace the rising throb of anguish.

In this manner several weeks passed,

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and the time was come which, as usual, brought Lady Arlington to town: About this period also Mr. Greville, being just arrived in London, became their frequent guest.

It was very possible for Osmond and Lady Ellen so to conduct themselves, as to impose upon the world at large; but it was not altogether so easy to blind the understandings of such interested and acute observers as Lady Arlington and Mr. Greville. The latter was the first to remark in Osmond a listlessness and dispiritedness, which betrayed itself most in a growing indifference to his public fame, and the distinction he had so early acquired for himself in the House; so true it is that, in a mind possessed of any delicacy of sentiment, no genuine satisfaction can

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be received by any tributes of praise, which a consciousness of general misconduct, and defect of principle, corrodes with a conviction of demerit.

In truth, Osmond was a strange sort of sinner. Reflection, in his case, mixed so singularly with vice, that he never could enjoy, unmolested by remorse, the guilty gratifications for which he paid so immense a price. As Hume, in his concise, but beautiful manner, describes one of the characters of his history, "he not only was deficient in that wisdom which adopts right measures, but he wanted the constancy which sometimes gives weight to wrong ones."

It was not difficult for his friend Mr. Greville very speedily to discover that some secret source of uneasiness was preying upon his mind, and undermining

its vigour. Too delicate to rush hastily without precious steps of preparation upon such a subject, he employed himself in silent observation upon the habits and occupations in which Osmond principally indulged. A very short time sufficed to afford him some suspicions not very remote from the truth.

He saw clearly that Osmond, equally unmindful of his public fame or private happiness, was descending from the lofty station his talents and his rank in life had procured for him, and was devoting himself to grovelling and unworthy pursuits—fatal, as he believed, to his respectability and his peace.

He only waited for an occasion to speak his fears, to advise—and, if advice failed, to intreat—for still too brilliant—too full of promise, as he conceived,

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was the fate of Osmond, to be yet contemplated without the most sanguine hopes of its proving ultimately distinguished and illustrious. He was not yet to be abandoned to his worst of foes—his turbulent passions—without an appeal to the powerful understanding which nature had granted him, to counterbalance their terrific sway.

The occasion Mr. Greville began so ardently to desire, at last presented itself; though not exactly in the shape he would have preferred; trusting, as he did, that the painful surmises which observation had suggested to him, were as yet strangers to the thoughts of others.

But this expectation was frustrated by the unusual circumstance of his being one morning invited by Lady Arlington

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to attend her at her own house, for the purpose, as she expressed it in her note, "of allowing her a private conference respecting her son Osmond."

To account for this request of her Ladyship's, we must specify that she, as well as Mr. Greville, having been visited with suspicions that all was not as it used to be between her son and his wife, had also endeavoured to discover, if possible, by the process of observation, what had occurred to interrupt their happiness—a happiness which it had constituted the chief part of her own to contemplate. But not having that scope for remark upon Osmond's open, unguarded disposition, which Mr. Greville's connexion with him afforded, she had applied her faculties of discernment to try and penetrate into the hidden sorrows

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of Lady Ellen! That some deep, though concealed source of continual care was devouring her, the Countess could not fail to remark; that it was something connected with Osmond was equally intelligible to her; for though his name was never uttered but with respect—though the stolen glance followed him whenever he appeared—seeking him instinctively, as it were, under every feeling, whether of anger or of tenderness—as the *all* of her imagination—the *all* of her existence—yet it was not with her now as it had been in former days. He was not her constant theme. So far from wandering, as she used to do, from every subject, to the mention of his name, the words that once were ever trembling on her tongue—those precious words—"my husband"—now were sel-

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dom heard. She spoke of him but rarely—seldom never but when unavoidably compelled to do so—and then it more frequently was with the cold appellation of "Mr. Lessingham"—than even the familiar term of Osmond. Her child was her only solace—yet even in the sportiveness she assumed, to amuse him, and awake his little mind to notice her, Lady Arlington with sorrow often remarked the glistening tears just ready to fall from her eyes, and witnessing against the smile she laboured to wear. On these occasions, feeling rather than perceiving that, with all her care to prevent it, her thoughts were read—her painful acting detected—she would sometimes catch the baby to her breast, and hurry from the presence of the Countess, with some attempted excuse for taking

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him away—an excuse which she too surely disdained to impose as little on her observer—as on herself.—"She believes that I have hastened away to weep," she would say—as over her unconscious child she gave indulgence to the long suppressed flood of anguish, which nature could no longer restrain. But, racked as was every feeling of her nature, Lady Ellen conceived that it would have been easier for her to die, than to open her heart, even to the dearest friend she had upon earth.

To be compelled to think unworthily of Osmond, was agony sufficient. To have spoken of him with reproach—to have heard that name, which had been embalmed in her imagination as synonimous with all that was grand and noble, pronounced in any accents of scorn or

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contempt, was a species of humiliation, to which she yet loved him too well, to support the possibility of submitting [illegible] nobler only one was to escape day by day—and hour by hour,—as ingenuity or artifice—or the ordinary course of circumstances could suggest, the searching penetration of Lady Arlington;—and she had so far succeeded, by dint of continued watchfulness, and by surrounding herself with company or occupation, or engagement of some kind or other, whenever her Ladyship's approach was to be expected, that she had contrived, as yet, to evade any directly painful and perplexing remarks.

One morning, however, she was rather earlier than usual, surprised by Lady Arlington, so evidently in the indulgence

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of tears, that it was scarcely possible for the Countess to avoid expressing some concern, if not alarm for her. Lady Ellen endeavoured to conceal her distress; and so much was she now in the habit of subduing emotion, that with an effort that astonished Lady Arlington, she, in a very few moments, appeared perfectly calm, apologizing for her uneasiness, by alleging an attack of nervous indisposition.

So determined an opposition to sympathy slightly displeased her visitor, who, withdrawing her hand from the tender grasp in which she had held that of Lady Ellen, as she anxiously inquired the cause of her emotion, retired to her chair, and began coldly to speak upon some other subject.

Lady Ellen saw, and grieved for the offence she had given; but the wealth

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of kindness, or, what at this moment was far dearer to her, to have obtained the power of regaining Osmond's love, could not have prevailed upon her to acknowledge to his mother that she was suffering, because again, for a whole night he had been a stranger to his house: a circumstance, not yet of such usual occurrence as to be remarked without pain, as a fresh proof—where none, alas, was wanting—of the contemptuous indifference he was careless of exhibiting for her.

Under their mutual state of feeling, conversation could not be otherwise than cold and restrained between her and Lady Arlington; and to avoid an embarrassment, which was every moment increasing, Lady Ellen proposed to the Countess to take an airing in the

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Park. To this the latter agreed, adding that her carriage was at the door, and they could go wherever Lady Ellen chose.

"But as it is rather too early to be seen in the Park, yet," said she, "and I want to look in at Mrs. Allen's, suppose we call there first."

Lady Ellen assented, and a very few minutes brought them within sight of the milliner's. Their carriage was prevented from drawing immediately up to the door, by the intervention of a hackney coach, which had stopped just before them.

This circumstance would have attracted no notice from Lady Ellen, but that, as soon as Mrs. Allen's door was opened, and the steps of the coach let down, both herself and Lady Arling-

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ton perceived two persons, a lady and a gentleman, to dart from it with a haste that indicated a great desire of escaping observation, and running up the steps, they were in the house, and the door was closed upon them in a moment.

Yet not so quickly but that both Lady Ellen and the Countess—the latter with a surprise that amounted almost to a panic—had detected, in the fine, graceful figure of the gentleman, a form, to which no other name but that of Osmond Lessingham could belong!

To Lady Ellen's sick heart but one recollection came,—but it sufficed to combine with it various wretched convictions, that Lady Jane Howard's idle insinuations, as she had *then* thought them, against the character of Mrs.

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Allen's house, were just, and that here was the solution of all that had been for months destroying her peace.

She spoke not—she only sighed—and pressed her hand to her beating forehead, and tried to collect her scattered thoughts. She had an idea that as she did not weep (for her present emotions were far beyond the influence of such relief), she might smile—and be composed—and *if* Lady Arlington *did* say any thing further upon this incident, she should be able to jest away her impressions if they were serious ones.

These thoughts were all fluttering at once in her poor head, whilst the carriage was drawing up to the door. Lady Arlington, having fixed her eyes upon the house, as if expecting to see through the walls, and then casting

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them upon her, and perceiving that she spoke not, remained for a few moments almost in a stupor of silent astonishment.

During this interval the servant opened the carriage door, and letting down the steps, looked as if he expected them to descend.

This action having no power to rouse Lady Ellen from her attitude of abstraction, the Countess took hold of her hand. "Will you get out, my love?" she said.

At these words she raised her head, and looked up at Lady Arlington, with a smile of acquiescence—but such a smile!

"Drive into the Park," said Lady Arlington; and the door being shut, she

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threw her arm round the unfortunate Lady Ellen, and drawing her to her compassionate bosom, she tenderly pressed her head to it, and herself burst into tears.

These tears were not less salutary to herself than to Lady Ellen, whom they affected to a degree that excited a flood of anguish from her own eyes. By degrees, her overpowered senses (recovering from the shock they had received) began to suggest to her the propriety and comfort (if she could accomplish it) of forbearing to talk upon what could only be discussed with unavailing sorrow by both of them.

"Let us go home—my dear friend—let us go home," said she, in an imploring accent to the Countess, "and—for-

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give me, if I do not—I cannot"—she sunk back, and sobbed in the extreme of convulsive agitation.

"My dearest Ellen, you shall not speak of him," said her affectionate friend; "he is not worthy of you."

"Oh, cease—pray—pray, cease," exclaimed the still doating wife, "but, believe—believe me—thankful to you—for your kindness"—her words were impeded—and she gave up the attempt to utter more. Lady Arlington, in fond, though silent sympathy, holding her hand between both her's, and continually raising it to her lips, till it was wet with the tears that were drowning her cheeks, at length brought her home. With a solicitude the most anxious and maternal, though, out of respect to her wishes, still silent, she would

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not yield to her desire of being left in solitude, at least till she had seen her more composed.

Lady Ellen's efforts to obtain some tranquillity were not unsuccessful. The hysteric sobs, which had shaken her gentle frame, almost to dissolution, died away into deep and long-drawn sighs. Now and then, indeed, a convulsive throb for a moment agonized her, but she was gradually regaining the power to think, and act, as under the pressure of her extreme calamity she judged to be the best.

Her decision announced itself in words, as soon as she could utter them. With an energy that was too solemn, too affecting, not to carry to the heart of Lady Arlington a conviction that she was irresistibly in earnest in her deter-

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mination to be silent upon the subject of her wrongs, she rose, and half turning from her, that the severity of her reason might not be disarmed by the tenderness, which a contemplation of her mother's pitying gaze could not fail to awaken, she thus addressed her:

"Your suspicions are awakened, Lady Arlington, that—" she paused a moment, but soon went on, "that my husband is faithless—and that I am deserted and unhappy—I will not breathe a murmur against him—I have sworn at the altar to love him, and had I not—to love him, was my lot."

She pressed her handkerchief for a moment to her eyes.

Lady Arlington, deeply moved, was beginning involuntarily to address her with words of endearment and consolation, but

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Lady Ellen, waving her hand, in supplication that she would forbear, thus went on:

"I find I cannot speak all that is labouring at my heart! I cannot tell you how dear, even in his errors, he still is to me—Perhaps it would sink me in your estimation to know it, and therefore it is better that I am silent—but think it—believe it, Lady Arlington; and then spare me—You cannot comfort me, kind and good as you are—no earthly being can comfort me—yet I am not comfortless—" and she raised her eyes with an expression that was almost divine. "I am not comfortless," she repeated. "Remember this, and grieve for me no more!"

She was gone before Lady Arlington had time to utter a syllable in reply. She had extended her hand, but per-

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ceiving that it was in vain to attempt to detain her, she sunk down into a chair, a victim to innumerable sorrows. Grief for the ill-requited affection of this admirable young woman, and grief for her own disappointed hopes, in the son of her pride and fondest love, heavily oppressed her. She believed that she could have pardoned almost any other species of fault in him, than that on which her present suspicions rested. There was something so revolting to her imagination, in contemplating the being whom nature had moulded for the exhibition of all that was grand and noble in conduct, descending to familiarize himself with the most degrading of vices. Alas! Lady Arlington had but to experience the fate of many a mother, as proud, and as admiring as herself. She had only to

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learn, what all must learn whose calamity it is to be connected with beings of strong and ungoverned inclinations—that there is no abasement, no degradation so low, to which the slave of passion will not—must not stoop. In the page of romance, in the description of the poet, the man of dark and turbulent emotions may be permitted to tower with wild sublimity, above all narrow views or paltry considerations; but turn we to the tale of real life—and let us read the sad history which is so constantly augmenting its sorrowful page. The heroes of passion are there—and they, too, are not without their moments of superb and beautiful feeling. But it mingles with a monotonous and debasing story. They, indeed, break hearts, as well as the champions of

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fiction—but not so splendidly; they bring grey hairs with sorrow to the grave; they drown the cheek of female innocence with tears; they embitter sweet hopes—darken bright prospects; and, sapping the very springs and source of life, make death a deliverance and a blessing to those (and they are commonly all who have the misfortune to be intimately connected with them) whom they have caused to suffer.

Returned home, Lady Arlington from useless regret proceeded to the more active inclination of doing something to open the eyes of her son to the cruelty as well as impropriety of his conduct towards his wife. But naturally shrinking herself from talking with him upon the subject, she remembered with great satisfaction the fortunate circumstance

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of Mr. Greville's being at that time in town, and from the influence she was aware that he possessed over Osmond, she augured so favourably from his interference, that she resolved immediately to impart to him so much of her conjectures about his present misconduct, as should induce him without loss of time to talk with Osmond very seriously.

It was this determination which prompted the note Mr. Greville had received from her, and of which we have already spoken.

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CHAP. VIII.

We shall not detail the conversation that took place between Lady Arlington and Mr. Greville. The result was, that the latter, immediately seeking Osmond, prevailed upon him to allow him an opportunity of conversing with him.

With the simple sincerity which characterized him, Mr. Greville, having spoken generally of his conviction, from Osmond's altered manner and habits, that he was involved in some circumstances of an embarrassing nature, proceeded, not to insinuations, but to a direct declaration, that he had accidentally been made acquainted with the

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character of the circumstances to which he alluded.

In the first instance, the fire and fury of Osmond's temper broke forth, as his friend expected it would, in indignation, that Mr. Greville should be influenced by anonymous information (for that gentleman had mentioned no name), and an angry resolution to suffer no one to interfere in his concerns.

Mr. Greville having patiently waited for a sober interval, and not finding it likely to arrive, rose, and saying that he must wait for another opportunity of proving to him that nothing but the most anxious regard for his interest had prompted him to speak, was leaving the room.

But Osmond, having exhausted the first ebullitions of his anger, began to perceive the indecorum of which he had

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been guilty, in addressing to the sincerest of his friends such intemperate language; an indecorum, too, which appeared to him, in the first moment of returning reason, as particularly disgusting, when contrasted with the quiet self-possession of Mr. Greville. He prevented his departure, by placing himself between him and the door, and laying his hand upon his arm, "No, don't leave me," he said, "don't leave me — forgive me, Greville — I am a wretched man!" He turned from him for a few moments in much emotion.

"I cordially forgive you," replied Mr. Greville, extending his hand; "I pity you, from the bottom of my heart."

"God knows," exclaimed Osmond, after an agitated pause, "God knows, I would do almost any thing to relieve my heart from the remorse that is tear-

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ing it to pieces—Oh! Greville, that wife of mine—I am destroying her—angel as she is, I am breaking her heart!"

He ceased awhile, and Mr. Greville, having taken two or three turns up and down the room, till the burst of feeling which shook the frame of Osmond had subsided, and which affected himself too much to admit of his addressing him as he could wish, as soon as he saw a prospect of his attending to his advice, began to offer it. He suggested to him, that if he were sincere in his repentance for the injury he had offered his wife, and in the admiration and respect he professed for her, nothing could be more direct and clear than the path before him. This indeed was clear and direct in any case, he said: "for were he unfortunate enough, instead of esteeming, to entertain an aversion for the partner

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of his name and fortune, he was not the less bound, by his conjugal vows, by his regard for his own respectability, and by every other consideration that elevates man into a reasonable and accountable being, to preserve inviolate his fidelity to her."

Osmond attended to him in mournful silence; and Mr. Greville proceeded then to touch him upon the side of his ambition, and his pride. He recalled to his remembrance the glorious prospects that dawned upon his opening career in public life; the immense advantages with which nature had distinguished him, as if she designed him to act a noble and conspicuous part upon the stage of human affairs. He suggested to him the poor and paltry exchange he was making, in bartering for effeminate and degrading pleasures, the dignified

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occupations, the grand and comprehensive views, the elevating pursuits of the statesman and the legislator. "And it is plain," he continued, "that these pleasures you seek afford you nothing like happiness—you acknowledge that you are miserable!"

"I am indeed—most miserable!" said Osmond, with a heavy sigh, his arms resting on the table, and hiding upon them his melancholy countenance.—Truly had he spoken, in calling himself miserable; for the first pleasing emotions of their renewed attachment passed away, the remorse of Caroline, and his own, preying upon the hearts of both, and exercising upon his turbulent and restless spirit a dominion, that once more was beginning, as heretofore, to make his presence a signal of distress

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and torture to this unhappy girl—these fatal but infallible consequences of their misconduct, were now every day becoming more evident, and every day and every hour embittering their intercourse.

The difficulty of returning to his former habits and occupations was now increased to Caroline, by the still more enfeebled state of her health; and her recoil from encountering, not the blushing virtuous reproofs of Mrs. Allen's eye, for these she knew well enough she had no cause to dread, but her coarse indifference to the subject altogether; an indifference, which, though she herself was in a degree benefited by it, Caroline had, in the midst of her frailty, too much innate modesty not to revolt from with disgust.

"Oh, that I were once more amongst

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my good, innocent family!" she would often exclaim, in the fervour of her remorse; a remorse, which in its intensity and unremitting torture, it would be in vain to attempt to pourtray. If, in her former connection with Osmond, a consciousness of guilt had linked to her imagination an idea of abasement which poisoned existence, and made it almost hateful to her, how much was this severe and overwhelming sentiment increased when she remembered the present situation of Osmond, and pictured to herself his deserted wife, loving him, no doubt, as Osmond only could be loved; musing over his altered attachment, lamenting his estrangement, it might be, perplexing her fond heart in visionary schemes for regaining his lost affections—those affections to which she

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had such strong, such sacred claims—"those affections," the miserable Caroline would often say, "of which I—I have been the wretch to bereave her!" and then again and again came the fruitless but oft-repeated wish, "oh, that I had never seen him any more! oh, that I were far away, in my own virtuous home!" and frequently overpowered by the anguish of her reflections, she meditated the possibility of escaping from every one, and returning to that dear beloved dwelling, which it had been such ruin for her to quit. But a lingering tenderness bound her still to the love of Osmond, as the only friend she had left; and this idea mingling with the horror and disdain she entertained for herself—a disdain that made her shrink from carrying into the bosom

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of domestic purity and peace, a character so unworthy of its shelter—this consideration operated to detain her from obeying the dictates of her reason, and kept her still bound in the fetters of vice—those fetters, whose iron may indeed be said "to enter into the soul,"

"There is no happiness for me!" exclaimed Osmond, raising his dejected head, and looking at Mr. Greville with an expression of intense wretchedness—"do what I will—I cannot act otherwise than as a villain;—if I desert this poor girl—"

"Your conduct will be cruel—you would say—" interrupted Mr. Greville; "But it is already cruel, to one who has much stronger claims upon you than she can possibly have. The first duty of a man who desires to be esteemed, or

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held in the slightest respect, is justice in all his dealings; without this principle, no splendour of talent can secure him from contempt. You are unjust at this time in your conduct to Lady Ellen! You cannot make her any atonement, without being unjust to another. This is very bad, certainly, and is as strong a test as need be given of great misconduct on your side. But, in a case of this kind, it can never come to a question, what is to be done. It may be a doubt to you whether you can return to your former affection, and habits of attention to your wife; in short, it may be a doubt to you, whether you will have sufficient firmness to renounce this attachment: but it can be no matter of doubt to you, that you ought to do it."

Osmond here got up, and in an agony

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of indecision walked with perturbed steps up and down the room. He sat down again—and Mr. Greville proceeded: "In regard to the object of your affection, if she be a woman possessed of the least spark of delicacy and principle, she will, however grieved to lose you, be convinced of the propriety of your parting with her, and acquiesce in the measure without any opposition. If she be so abandoned and worthless as to—"

"She is not abandoned and worthless!" exclaimed Osmond, in a transport of grief and indignation; "she is modesty itself! She would not have heard the tenth part of what you have said, to urge me to renounce her, without herself flying from me, never to return. She abandoned and worthless! Oh, my poor, poor girl!"—his words were interrupted by his tears.

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"I did not mean to offend you, Osmond," said Mr. Greville, moved to pity in beholding the variety of conflicting passions which alternately disputed for dominion in the breast of this unfortunate young man; "I did not mean to offend you."

"No, no—I am well assured you did not: but bear with me a little; I wish to act right—I will, if it be possible."

"It is then, assuredly, very possible," said Mr. Greville, catching eagerly at his words. "Do not sit down to think—you must immediately act: you must not see her; you must"—write your farewell, —he was going to add, but the solitude and deliberation that would precede this measure came to his recollection in all its dangers; and before he suggested it, he offered himself as the bearer of any

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species of communication he chose to make, "Here," continued he, "here the materials are at hand," drawing towards him a writing table; "be as affectionate as you will, but be brief and decided; and I promise you that I will myself deliver it to the person to whom it is addressed."

But in vain Osmond took the pen in his hand, and attempted to write.

"I cannot—it is in vain," he said, throwing it down; "I cannot put the sign and seal upon my own infamy!" Then catching a glance of the regret, not unmingled with contempt, which was expressed in the countenance of Mr. Greville, "but I will commission you," he continued, "as standing to me in the light of my best and dearest friend, to see her, and say to her what you think best. You will offer her from me every

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compensation—you will be kind—" He paused a moment; and buried his face in both his hands.

"I will speak to her as a father," said Mr. Greville; "now give me her address."

Osmond wrote it down: "Mrs. Lessingham, No. 4—, Brompton Row."

"Now, God forgive me!" he exclaimed, casting from him the pen with which he wrote it, and throwing himself down upon the sofa, in a paroxysm of sorrow that it was misery to look upon.

Twice did Mr. Greville return from the door, whither he had walked in his eagerness to execute his well intended purpose, and compassion almost worked upon him to remain a little while, to sympathize in the wretchedness his counsels had occasioned; but his habits of decision and self-command withheld him

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from so dangerous and useless a proceeding; and though his heart was melting with pity, he compelled himself to leave the suffering Osmond, and immediately to pursue his way to Brompton.

It happened that morning that Mrs. Allen had just forwarded to Caroline a letter that had been sent for her to St. James's Street. It was from her father. As he very seldom wrote to any one, except he was absolutely obliged, a voluntary communication from him was always esteemed by his children in proportion to its rarity. He had written to Caroline much oftener than to any other branch of his family; but, particularly affectionate as he was to her, he had never addressed her in writing above three times since she left home.

The sight of his hand-writing was now like the stroke of a poignard in her

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breast; and having repeatedly taken it up to try and look at it, but shrinking from the contemplation, again and again laid it down, she at last tore open the seal, and read as follows:—

"My dearest child:—We have been now a great while absent from one another, and I long to see you again. I desire it the more, because I am not now very well, and I am getting to that time of life when health is very uncertain, and when the greatest comfort a man can have, who is blessed with good children, as I thank God I am, is to see them all happy about him. Your poor mother is not, I think, so well as usual, and the affairs of my farm have not been altogether so prosperous as I could wish. Thus you see, my dear child, that we are, upon the whole, in a little distress;

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and what has added to our grief, has been to hear from you so seldom; and then, though you do not complain, there is a tone of dejection in your letters that I do not like. I wish, therefore, very much, that you would return to us, if Mrs. Allen will be kind enough to spare you. I think, if we had our dear Carry amongst us again, we should all be happy; and none more so than her most affectionate father,

"C. Lascelles."

"P.S. If you will write, and fix your day, Charles shall meet you at D—, and you will be surprised to see what a fine, handsome lad he is grown; and, moreover, extremely proud and happy to be the escort of his sister."

It was over this letter that the poor Caroline was weeping and praying, when Mr. Greville, unannounced, but directed

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by the servant, who opened the house door, where he was to find her, entered the room. Yes, she was praying—as well as weeping—for ever, as a momentary cessation from heart-breaking sobs admitted the utterance of a word, that word was a supplication—broken, and imperfect—but issuing from the very depth of her soul,—a supplication that Heaven in its mercy would take her to itself.

No other visitor than Osmond ever approached her in her guilty retirement. In this hour of anguish and remorse, his presence brought with it an accumulation of grief and penitence. She heard, as she believed, his entrance into the room—she heard the door close after him—but to have raised her head from the clasped hands on which it

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rested—to have risen from that attitude of kneeling repentance, in which, subdued and broken-hearted, she had unconsciously sunk down, as she finished the perusal of her father's letter—to have raised to him her streaming eyes—to have moved—or to have spoken—was to her an impossibility, that for many moments she struggled not to resist.

At length the words "we must part, Osmond—we must never—never meet again,"—murmured through heavy sighs—and, almost inaudible, vibrated to the heart of Mr. Greville.

Once before he believed that he had heard that voice—then, as now, in accents of extreme distress! Once before he had surely seen that half-concealed, but beautiful face! Those soft, sunny ringlets, falling over it—so re-

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markable, so peculiarly natural, and lovely—this was surely not the first time they had met his view! The name with which those associations were combined broke from his lips—"Miss Lascelles!" he uttered in a tone of astonishment, that scarcely seemed to expect the appellation would be recognized.

But it instantly was, with a start of horror—the voice was not the voice of Osmond! and with an exclamation of agitated surprise she hastily rose, and turned her terrified gaze upon the intruder who had so unexpectedly stolen upon her sorrows.

It sufficed to recall to both of them that they had met before.—"Mr. Greville!"—but she said no more—she hid her face—and sobbed violently.

He was the first to break a silence,

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that was too deeply fraught with emotion to be embarrassing, though it was very long—for both of them were lost in surprise, and in mutual endeavours to understand how either of them, at that moment, came into the presence of the other.

"I am astonished," said Mr. Greville, "I am at a loss—but," correcting himself, after a short reflection, "all is perhaps intelligible enough—your acquaintance with Mr. Lessingham is not of *very* recent occurrence?"

"You are informed, then! Osmond has betrayed me!" she replied, in a tone of agony. "Cruel Osmond—was this necessary?" she added in a lower voice, and with a cheek, whose ashy paleness was for a moment exchanged for the deepest crimson.

"He did not know, neither did I,"

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replied he, in a mild, conciliatory manner, "when he suffered my counsels to prevail with him, that I was at all acquainted with the person to whom he had attached himself. Had I known it," he continued, in a voice that faltered a little, "those counsels would have been sooner offered, for your sake, as well as his—for circumstances have made your interest somewhat dear to me."

"Oh, Sir, you are too good to me," replied the weeping Caroline; "I am degraded—I am lost; but still I am not so wicked as I seem. There never was but one I loved—and for his sake I gave up every thing. I suffered for him—not more than I deserved—but a great deal of affliction; and the worst affliction of all—a sad accusing conscience! And now he has betrayed me! But I deserve it—and ten times worse—

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yes, I deserve his contempt—but it is very hard to bear."

Fruitless was every attempt Mr. Greville made to interrupt this burst of natural resentment and grief. His presence, he perceived, brought with it but one idea, that Osmond had revealed her frailty to another. It was true, that the utmost skill and contrivance could not have more ingeniously managed that her lapse from virtue should be known only to one and the same individual, than the accidental combination of present circumstances had occasioned; but this was a consideration to which her irritated feelings could not admit of her immediately turning, till the well-judging mind of Mr. Greville had applied itself to work upon her understanding; which he did, by briefly stating to her his connexion with Os-

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mond—his interest in his welfare—his accidentally discovering his attachment to her—and the recent conversation between them, which had led to his present visit.

He dwelt with proper feeling upon the extreme distress with which Osmond had been prevailed upon to be guided by his counsels. As he expected, this assurance tended considerably to soften the irritated feelings with which she had, at first, contemplated his conduct, and becoming more calm, she could soon reply to him in a connected manner. Her chief anxiety, in justice to herself, was to explain her situation as far as it related to Osmond. She told, in her own unadorned and affecting language—sometimes impeded, but, from her earnestness to stand well in the sight of her former benefactor, on

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the whole sufficiently intelligible—she told of her first acquaintance with Osmond when she was living in her father's house—her affection for him subduing her virtue—her quitting home—her agony in finding him gone abroad—her affliction tempting her to destroy herself—the rescue Mr. Greville himself had afforded her—but here her tears and agitation so wholly overpowered her, and affected her auditor, that he would not suffer her to proceed.

"I understand it all," he said; "tell me no more—I cannot myself bear it;" and he walked to the window to hide an emotion, which he was almost ashamed to indulge.

But Caroline could not refrain—her suffering heart was too full for silence! She seemed to have found the only real friend she had ever known, since

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she left her father's protection; and, as if he were that dear father himself, she yearned for his sympathizing pity.

"The poor baby that you were so kind to," she began, and then her thoughts going off to the manner in which that kindness had been secreted from her knowledge, "but that I did not know—or I would have lost my life in labouring for him, before your generosity should have been so trespassed upon," she continued; "and many times I have thought to tell Osmond what you did for me—and not let him think, as he did, that Mrs. Allen served me, when it was you—good—generous—"

"But the poor child!" interrupted Mr. Greville.

"He is dead, Sir," she replied, bursting into fresh tears—"and that event brought Osmond and me together again

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—but we never have been happy—oh never—never!"

"It is in vain," said Mr. Greville, sitting down by her side, and gently taking her hand to enforce his words, as well as to imply his pity, "it is in vain, you see, by painful experience, to expect happiness in a situation of guilt, Osmond, as well as you, calls himself miserable—and miserable no doubt he is. If there were no other cause for your separation, the discomfort of it ought to suffice to induce it;—but there are—"

"Oh, Sir—this is unnecessary," said Caroline, hastily interrupting him: "do not think so meanly of me, as to suppose I require any arguments to prevail upon me to acquiesce in Osmond's resignation of me. He could bear me witness that never, in our happiest—or, should I not rather say, in our least

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miserable moments, have I had an interval from the deepest—the most cutting remorse—never has there been an instant in which, if I could have gone back to my father, worthy of that fond welcome I feel so sure he would accord me—never has there been an instant of our guilty intercouse I would not gladly—thankfully have exchanged, for one hour spent under my own virtuous roof, with my own dear family."

"Oh, it has been an alliance of sin and sorrow between us," she continued after a short interval, in which she struggled for calmness; "the displeasure of Heaven was upon us both!"

"But the time is come," said Mr. Greville, "when your repentance for the past, being sincere, and the only atonement you can make, in returning to

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your virtuous home, offered up to Heaven, we may trust that this displeasure will be removed, and you will be at peace."

"Yes—I shall be at peace—I shall soon be at peace," she replied with mournful earnestness; "my heart is broken" —and she laid her hand upon her bosom.

"You must not,"—Mr. Greville was attempting to add, "give way to these desponding ideas,"—but something prevented his articulation, and again he walked from her for a few minutes. As soon as he was composed, he returned to his seat by her side; but did not again take her hand, neither did he look upon her affecting countenance. He turned his eyes elsewhere, as he was beginning to resume his address to her.

"As you are very properly and com-

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mendably desirous of renouncing thi unfortunate connexion, the sooner you quit this place the better. I do not see why you should not this very day return home."

"This very hour—this very instant, Sir," exclaimed Caroline. "Oh, do not think that I will retract—you yourself shall bear witness of my departure—you yourself shall go back to Osmond, and tell him that you saw me quit this abode of guilt! Yes, now—now—" and with wild impatience she rose from her seat. But Mr. Greville, anxious as he was for prompt measures, had no desire to hurry her into any action that might precipitate her into difficulties.

"Stay a moment," he replied, constraining her to resume her seat. "There are a few circumstances previously to be

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arranged—whither do you intend to go from hence?"

"To Woodhurst," she replied; "to my dear home—to my dear father; he will receive me with delight—wretch that I am, his arms will be open to me: oh, bless him!" she continued, in a transport of emotion, taking from the ground the letter she was reading when Mr. Greville entered, casting her eyes upon it with a smile, and then vehemently pressing it to her lips—"God bless him," she repeated. "Oh, Sir," she continued, turning to Mr. Greville, "unfortunate and degraded as I must appear to you, I once was the darling of good people. You have nothing but my poor word for this assurance; but if you will cast your eyes over that letter, you will see how I was once loved, and

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valued!" and she offered it to his hand; but he gently waved it from him—for a few seconds covering his face with his hand, and remaining silent.

A stranger to his habits, the poor Caroline, conceiving that all this was but a just sentiment of indifference for any further insight into the affairs of one so unworthy as herself, did not press upon him the perusal of her letter, but dejectedly folding it up, she faintly murmured, "I have no right to expect you to think better of me—I deserve your contempt."

"You deserve my pity—my deepest sympathy," replied Mr. Greville with a faltering voice, and you have both. I can too well believe what a father's love and pride in you may have been, to re-

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quire any evidence beyond yourself to prove it."

"But," he added, after a short pause, "before you quit London, you must point out to me, as Mr. Lessingham's friend, in what manner he can testify to you his grateful sense—" he ceased for a moment, doubtful how to convey a meaning, which Caroline's astonished countenance assured him nothing but the most explicit acknowledgment would enable her to comprehend.

That Osmond, when he parted with her, should offer her any pecuniary recompense for the loss of his attachment was a circumstance which, to her simple mind, was scarcely to be conceived; and when Mr. Greville, in the most cautious and skilful manner, had made the

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matter intelligible to her, it seemed as if she had never suffered from the cruelty of Osmond till now.

She did not immediately make any reply. She appeared lost in a tumult of indignant feelings. At last she rose, and labouring to speak calmly, "you may tell him, Sir," she said, "that when he gave me his heart—when he told me that I was dearer to him than all the world beside—even when he loved my child, and rescued him from want—when he was most my comfort, and my only friend—he made me no adequate compensation for the remorse he has brought upon my head! and does he think that money—does he think that if he pays me for my ruin—oh, Osmond, this is insult, indeed!"

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"Nay—nay," said Mr. Greville, "you misunderstand—you mistake."

But as well might he have addressed himself to the raging sea. It was not till this paroxysm of indignation had passed away, that he could prevail upon her to listen to the arguments he brought forward, not only to exculpate Osmond, but to prove to her that his conduct in this respect was the result of the most ardent interest and affection for her.

"Well, Sir," she replied, "whatever be my opinion of him, my sentiments for you can never be any other than those of the deepest gratitude and esteem. Twice have you rescued me from perdition. Oh, my preserver!" and she would not be denied his hand.

"But your journey," said Mr. Gre-

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ville, desirous to turn this tide of unavailing and enervating emotion into the firmness of action. "You will set off to-day?"

"I will go now," she replied.

"But you have preparations to make; your clothes to—"

"I have nothing," she returned; "I will take with me nothing but myself. I left my father's roof, poor; I return to it poor. I will carry with me only my repentant heart. You shall see me go, Sir; that is, if you will be so kind—for I have no friend here, and I am very ignorant how to proceed."

"You really *can* go, immediately, without inconvenience to yourself?" inquired Mr. Greville.

She gave a decided affirmative, only specifying a wish that Mrs. Allen should be informed of her departure.

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This Mr. Greville undertook to communicate to her; and recommended that the reason alleged for her taking this step should be shewn, by making Mrs. Allen acquainted with the letter Caroline had that morning received from her father, and which she told him contained a request for her return.

"I would rather she should know that I have renounced this life of guilt—and from penitence and contrition, have returned home," she replied.

"She will probably infer that, from your going at all," replied Mr. Greville; "and if not, I will take care she shall be made acquainted with it."

He then began to consider when, and in what manner she could proceed to the execution of her good purpose; and, leaving her for a short time to make a

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few inquiries, he found when he returned that she was quite ready to accompany him to the inn, from whence a stage-coach was, that afternoon, within the space of an hour, to set off for the North, and would on the following day pass through her native place. Their ride to the inn in the city was almost a silent one, for both were lost in reflections too earnest for speech; but when they were arrived there, "our acquaintance has not been a common one," said Mr. Greville, drawing her aside, just before he handed her into the coach, after he had, with the anxiety of the most affectionate father, arranged every thing for her comfort and accommodation; "and I must always feel a very strong interest in you." His voice faltered as he pronounced the words—"If you should

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want a friend—" he pressed her hand, and Caroline, ardently returning it, looked in his face; but he passed his hand quickly across it, and drawing his hat hastily over it, he hurried her forward, put her into the coach, closed the door upon her, and hastened away.

Caroline looked after him—but he never once turned his head. The benediction that had risen to her lips, and which she had as yet been incapable of uttering, died away unpronounced, and she burst into tears.

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CHAP. IX.

Mr. Greville did not think it necessary, or desirable, to enter into the detail of what had passed in his interview with Caroline, or to inform Osmond that they had met before. He simply stated to him her perfect readiness, and even desire, to end the connexion, and to quit London immediately; which, Mr. Greville added, that he himself had assisted her to do, by attending her to the coach, and seeing her depart.

She was gone, then, and both Mr. Greville and Lady Arlington were satisfied that one material obstacle to Os-

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mond's returning to the path of duty was removed; but no change of conduct, either on his side or on Lady Ellen's, gave evidence that any portion of their former happiness was restored. She was still silent—but still suffering. He was more than ever absent from home—absent from his public duties; not cold or indifferent to his friends, for he was worse than this: he was resentful for imagined offences—morose—haughty—unkind. In short, he was indicating, by every word and deed, that he was at enmity with himself and with all the world.

If there were no other fatal consequences attendant upon irregular habits and sinful pleasures, the distaste they produce for the calm simplicity of domestic enjoyment (the only species of

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enjoyment that can even pretend to any stability) is a consideration that might, one would think, suffice to make the man of understanding shrink from their indulgence.

Few are the persons who have outlived the first heat and inexperience of youth, whose observation does not compel them to foresee, that it is at home that all the pursuits and occupations of life must be brought to their test. We do not speak of the "*Home*" that figures on an invitation card—but we speak of the sanctuary where we take off our cumbrous garb of ceremony, and dare to be what we really are; of that asylum where we live, and, what is much more important, where we must die—of that hallowed receptacle, in

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which we do not venture after deception, since deception there cannot impose upon any one, but where all about us is real and true. Here it is that we learn the emptiness or the value of the thoughts and desires that most engross us; and here it was that Osmond, wearied for want of excitement, angry for the loss of what never was happiness, disdaining himself—but, in the stubbornness of his guilty pride, disdaining still more the torments of remorse, that would in some moments of extreme suffering almost have induced him to ask the forgiveness and the pity of his wife—here it was that he found such unremitting agony, that his return to his own house was now ever met as the signal of suffering; and at the first

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opportunity of quitting it in the morning, he fled from it as from the haunt of demons.

The efforts of Mr. Greville to converse with him, and to resume his former influence over him, were quite ineffectual. He was stubborn in his determination not to allow him a private interview. With the unreasonableness of a mind at variance with itself, he sought for occasions of dissatisfaction with his best friend—he endeavoured to reconcile his displeasure, by representing to himself that Mr. Greville, instead of being serviceable, had, in fact, severely injured him, by separating him from Caroline. His miserable sophistry tried to make it appear, that while he conducted himself with decent politeness to his wife, he was as much justified

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as three-fourths of his acquaintance were, in taking what measures he chose on the subject of his own happiness—a subject with which, he endeavoured to persuade himself, no one else had any concern.

Like most persons who mourn the loss of a desired object, he forgot the care and anxiety its presence had occasioned him. He saw nothing now in his lost Caroline but the most charming attractions; not remembering, when those attractions were near him, how poorly they had compensated for the mutual guilt and remorse of their common situation.

In this distracted state of feeling, he gave himself up to every species of dissipation that came in his way. The kind and degree of lawless gratification in

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which he indulged was only suspected by his friend Mr. Greville. Aware that his interference at this period would only subject him to a repetition of insulting repulses, to which he could not with any propriety submit, he turned with sorrowful disgust from the contemplation of a conduct, which he perceived, with the deepest concern, he had not now the power to influence.

The time for his departure from town being arrived, he left it without any communication with Osmond, or taking any other leave than that which this short note contained:

"I am going, as usual, into the country for the summer. A parting interview between us, at the present moment, would be productive of no good. The time will probably come when

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you may wish that you had seen me, and suffered my honest counsels to prevail. Whenever such a wish should occur to you, it will not, I hope, be too late for you to remember, that you still have a faithful friend in yours,

"H. Greville."

Such was the farewell of Mr. Greville. That of Lady Arlington was not even so kind. She was also on the point of going; but though in the most affectionate manner she took leave of Lady Ellen and her grand-child, the name of Osmond was never pronounced by her.

Her disdain of his conduct was equal to her disappointment, and, till suffering or penitence had brought him to a sense of the error of his ways, it was her fixed determination to acknowledge him no more as her son.

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Thus was the misconduct of Osmond estranging him from the best and dearest of his friends. But one yet remained to him! It was that inestimable wife, who, amidst the shipwreck of every hope, still clung to him with desperate firmness; bound by her marriage vows, but still more by the tenderness of her constant heart, to forsake him not.

Nothing but this tenderness of feeling and principle could have sustained her against the increasing coldness, not to say unkindness, of Osmond's behaviour. In that state of wretched despondency, which results from a conviction of being the object of universal and merited contempt, he interpreted the silence and dejection of his wife into an expression of disdain, which, however deserved, it was not in his nature

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to brook—and fled from her sight as he would from the most angry and reproachful of his accusers.

The usual period for their departure into the country was long since passed, and the oppressed spirits of Lady Ellen pined after the quiet and soothing calm of her beloved retreat at Richmond. Many times she had worked herself up to a resolution to propose the subject to her husband: for so constrained and distant was now their intercourse, that it really did require a kind of effort to attempt any thing more than the exchange of mere politeness. Such a state of domestic communication was very easily to be instituted in London, where an excuse for absence or occupation is never wanting; but in the country, Lady Ellen foresaw that some very

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decided change must be adopted, especially as her health and habits had precluded her adopting the custom of most persons of rank, that of crowding her country-seat with visitors, as the only means of escaping the horrors of retirement.

She and her husband had once been too happy in each other, to be dependent upon the charity of any of those humane persons, who go about to relieve the distresses of those, to whom a family party in the country is an affliction of the most overpowering nature.

But the period was arrived, and she contemplated it with real grief, when the presence of a third person was apparently so essential to the tolerable comfort of her husband, that she could not

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imagine a possibility of his assenting to accompany her from London, without adopting the precaution of ensuring it. Such a measure she anticipated as the seal of their total estrangement; and recoiling from the possibility of hearing it proposed, she put off from day to day the mention of her wish to return to Richmond, in the prophetic certainty that it would be a painful crisis in her present suffering state of mind; and suffering as it was, it was still not so wretched as it might be. Osmond still kept up some appearances; she saw him every day—he might abandon her entirely. She felt upon the edge of a frightful precipice—driven there by no misconduct of her own, and therefore as yet only pitiable; but one false step,

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one rash, unguarded measure, might precipitate her into an abyss of unceasing misery and reproach.

She was in this state of painful, undecided feeling, when one morning she was surprised by Osmond's remaining in her boudoir some minutes after Colonel Howard, whom he brought in with him, had taken his leave.

He had evidently something to say; and, with an emotion scarcely less intense than when she first received his offered vows, Lady Ellen, divided between hope and fear, sat in breathless expectation of the words he might utter.

But the latter sentiment was predominant, when, having walked to the end of the room, and taken up his hat, and apparently armed himself with as much

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carelessness as could make the remark a thing of no consequence, he said,

"The town is getting confoundedly stupid—and terribly hot—I must be off somewhere, soon."

"I am quite ready to go, whenever you like," was the prompt reply of Lady Ellen.

He paused a moment or two in his answer, and laid down his hat; "I suppose you will be for Richmond," he replied; "that *toujours perdrix*," and he attempted a smile—but it had too much irony in its expression to be pleasing, or to imply good-humour.

"If there is any other place you prefer," said she, "you need only to name it;" it was with difficulty she could repress the tears that started to her eyes,

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as she thought how truly *she* could have said that, "when with him all places were the same to her."

"I am quite sure you would not prefer the place I could name as most agreeable to me—you would hardly like to go to Geneva?"

She thought of her child—and after a little hesitation replied, "I should not like to leave the boy." She was going to add, "but if you wish it, I will;" when Osmond interrupted her, by remarking, in a tone that too clearly indicated a satisfaction in her decision, "No, it would not be right—I am far from wishing it; but for myself, I think of joining the Howards for a month or two."

"A month or two!" Lady Ellen repeated, in the alarm that seized upon

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her heart. "Did not Colonel Howard say just now they were going for six months?"

"Very likely—but I shall not be tied down to their time. I shall stay as long or as short a time as I please;" and he looked at her, almost furiously.

"Unquestionably," was her calm remark. She felt herself too imperiously called upon to be cool—to be tranquil—to support her own respectability, or else, how freely could she have sunk down at his feet, and implored him to tell her how she had lost his love! since lost it irrecoverably must be, before he could thus look, and thus speak to her.

He misinterpreted her quiet answer into an expression of the most cutting contempt.

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"I have your permission, then," he replied, with a sarcastic bend, "my wife is so obliging as to allow her husband the privilege of doing as he likes. I believe, then, I shall take advantage of your indulgence," and with a slight bow, an appearance of courtesy, that only contrasted with frightful effect the furious indignation that agitated his countenance, he was leaving her; but she prevented him. She took his hand in one of hers, the other she laid upon her throbbing bosom; she raised her eyes, as if the hour of trial was come, and she invoked the only aid that could support her through it, and then, after one or two ineffectual efforts, she spoke.

"Osmond," she said, "that I once

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loved you—nay, that I do still love you—not with a girlish, passing passion, but with all the sincerity of a constant nature—is not now my boast—but rather my reproach."

"Nay hear me, I have little to say," she continued, interrupting the expressions of restless dissatisfaction with which he remained in the room—and his beginning reply of—

"I thank you—this flattering assurance—"

"I have little to say," she proceeded, "but that little is of importance. For some months I have been suffering from a *knowledge* of the wrongs you have committed against me."

Osmond repressed the start of surprise—but it was not in his power to

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conceal the indication his features gave of the shame and astonishment with which he heard this avowal.

"You have condescended, then, to traffic with informers, Lady Ellen!" was his poor attempt at recrimination; but the shafts of this attack fell powerless beneath her conscious uprightness of dealing.

"I never condescended to any action," she steadily replied, "that I should blush to proclaim in open day. I cannot stoop to refute your accusation—if you had known the extent and value of my love, little as you esteem it, you would have believed it incapable of surmising a thought to your prejudice, till facts, from which in vain I would have turned my eyes, revealed to me—what no informer should have been

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heard to utter; for who, in my presence, would have dared to pronounce, in any accents but those of respect, a name which is still so associated in my mind with fond remembrances—still so dear—" she ceased—and for a little interval gave free indulgence to her tears.

Osmond, with his head resting on his clasped hands, had listened in visible agitation as she spoke;—he sighed heavily, but excepting that an ejaculation, expressive of deep mental anguish, occasionally escaped him, he spoke not. His silence afflicted, but it confirmed her in her determination; and believing that she had surmounted her momentary weakness, she proceeded:

"Whilst I believed you possessed a particle of esteem for me, in short,

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whilst you were disposed to keep any measures with me, miserable as is the present state of our constrained intercourse, it was less my interest than my inclination still to remain with you—but the weakness of my affection must not be suffered to interfere with the respect I owe myself. It is not exaggeration—it is not a mere figure of speech I use, when I say, that at one period of our married life, it would have been far more welcome to me to have died the most cruel of deaths, than to have lived in a state of separation from you;" again she was compelled unwillingly to pause—but soon went on: "judge then, Osmond, how complete must be the conviction—how acute—how overpowering the anguish—which makes me capable of acquiescing in such a mea-

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sure—if, as I have but too much cause to believe, such a measure would add to your happiness."

"To my happiness!"—Osmond groaned, rather than pronounced.

"Take away from your misery, perhaps, I might more justly have said," she continued. "I offer it to your consideration, then, Osmond—and, in doing so, I say nothing of myself—if I cannot contribute to your happiness, I can refrain from adding to your sorrow—God knows, it has not been from want of will, but of ability, that I have ceased to please you—but—"

"No more,"—exclaimed Osmond, impetuously rising from his seat,—"for God's sake no more—unless you wish to drive me mad!"—Then for an instant looking at her with the deepest, the

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most touching earnestness—"oh, Ellen, in an evil hour you joined your fate to mine! Pray that you may see me no more—pray that we may never meet again!" and, with an impulse that savoured of insanity, snatching her to his heart, he pressed his lips to her's, and hurried precipitately from her presence.

"What have I done!—what *have* I done!" was the agonizing thought that occurred to the unfortunate creature he left behind him, as soon as the first gush of emotion was over, and reflection came—in what shape she could not immediately tell, but she believed to accuse, and to condemn.

But in the calmer interval of her sober reason, however her woman's love was wounded, she found, in the approval of her conscience and her understanding,

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a moment of calm consideration, that made her sensible with horror.

To dwell together upon their present footing was, to her susceptible and tender mind, to protract the tortures of a living death. She had truly told her husband, that, acquainted as she was with his behaviour, he still was little less than as dear to her as ever. Her words might not literally express as much—nor convey a decided assurance that even now, if he would return to her, the affection of the bride was not more ardent than would be the love of the forgiving wife: but her tears—her broken accents—her utter incapability of naming his estrangement from her without the deepest emotion—these must plead for her, she thought, if Osmond had a heart accessible to nature

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and to tenderness—and if these failed, there was yet another plea—she was the mother of his child! not the child perhaps of his love, but the child that must be the prop of his ambition;—the child who would bear his name—inherit his fortunes, and sustain the credit of his family. "Oh, he must love him!" she continued, in her painful soliloquy; "and if he loves him, he must have some value for me—he will not forsake us—he cannot have the heart to do it!"

Thus clinging to every reed of comfort, alternately hoping and despairing, but in the firmness of her spirit once having ascertained the answer of her conscience, never suffering herself to be tortured by unjust and useless self-upbraidings for what she had said to him, the day passed away; and the lapse of

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evening into night, without producing any tidings of Osmond, was beginning to turn her doubts of his return into the most alarming fears, when all her anxiety was decided by the receipt of the following letter—though it could scarcely be called a letter—the handwriting and the language equally indicating that the writer was, as he expressed himself, in a state of mind, only differing from madness, inasmuch as he was sensible of his insanity.

"When you read this, Ellen, I shall be far away from you. I cannot live within the contemplation of the excellence I have so injured and insulted—Dear—blessed woman—why did you give yourself in marriage to a wretch like me?—I was never worthy of you—I am worthy of nothing but eternal per-

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dition—and it *will* come!—But you shall not be implicated in it—you shall not suffer for me. Alas!—you will think I rave—and, indeed, my senses are well nigh gone—but the blessing of madness is not mine, for I am sensible of my wanderings.—I sat down to write to you—I thought I had something to say, not in vindication of myself, for that would be in vain—but something that would excite your pity—but it dies away.—I go, Ellen—I go to a foreign country—I do not ask you to write to me—but direct some one to communicate to me your commands, as to what, in the forms of law, may require my assent; it will reach me at the post-office at Calais.

"Farewell, Ellen!—my wife—my child,—farewell."

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Over this letter Lady Ellen shed no tears, she breathed no sigh, she uttered no sounds of lamentation. In the same attitude of speechless despair in which it fell from her hands—in that attitude she remained, till her attendant, wondering at the unusually late hour to which she protracted her retiring for the night, ventured on some pretence to seek her.

"Dear, my lady, what is the matter? —have you had any bad news of Mr. Lessingham?" were the words that first roused her from the stupefaction in which extreme distress had steeped every faculty of sense.

She took up the letter, and mournfully shaking her head, she waved her hand in signal of her desire to be left alone.

But her gentle and endearing manners

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had too sincerely attached to her every member of her household, especially one so immediately about her person as Miss Hopkins, to admit of her being left in a situation of such suffering.

"I cannot go, my lady—I cannot, indeed!" The affectionate creature burst into tears—then, bethinking her of every topic of consolation that would have any chance of success, she named the child: "the baby is awake, my lady!"

It was the right chord she had touched.

"Bring him to me," the poor Ellen could scarcely articulate—for at this fond recollection the salutary tears, so long denied, broke forth in torrents.

With sobs, that seemed to tear her tender frame in pieces, she clasped to her bosom the all that was left her in her

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wreck of happiness. Then, as if the very sight of him was agony insupportable, she would resign him to his nurse. —"I cannot bear it—away—away!" But it was only for a moment; no sooner was he taken from her arms, than she demanded him again; and in these alternations of feeling the first violence of anguish exhausted itself.

When they had passed away, and in the pause of passion an interval of thought and reflection occurred, it was reflection which brought with it anxiety for Osmond's sake, scarcely less oppressive than what had been her sufferings on her own account.

It was not till after the expiration of a week, when she had quitted town, and was once more returned to her beloved abode at Richmond, that the re-

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sult of her sorrows and her prayers was manifested in the following letter to her husband.

"I told you, Osmond, in our last interview, that if I could not add to your happiness, I would refrain from increasing your sorrows—I spare, therefore, wholly to speak of myself. The measure you have adopted I was the first to name; if, therefore, I suffer from it, I suffer, perhaps, justly. The subject on which you desire to hear from me, it is torture to me to be compelled to speak upon; but since you desire it, this is my reply—the only reply I can now, or ever give. All that was valuable to me in existence is gone with your attachment: I will receive no compensation for its loss. I have retired with my child to Richmond—there we will live,

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dependents upon your pleasure—dependents upon— Osmond, I cannot write upon this topic—do not demand it of me—I only ask it of you not to interpose an eternal bar to our re-union! This is a weak request—but pardon me, I am very weak—I said I would not speak of myself, and hitherto I have spoken of nothing else! But though I seem this poor egotist, incapable of sustaining sorrow without the wailings of a child—believe me, Osmond, there is one whose fate is now far more interesting to me than my own: for *my* fate is sealed—*my* worldly part is finished. But your's—my husband!—here I may be permitted to speak—here I may be suffered to tell of tears, and heart-rending groans—of prayers scarce uttered from intensity of anguish—when I would

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suggest to you how deep and earnest is the interest I ever must bear in your destiny. Oh, my beloved Osmond, if in this world I must see you no more, bereave me not of the only hope that I would nourish—to the last—let me trust to meet you again—where earth, and earth's temptations, will be done away. Oh, my husband! look forward to this better dwelling-place, and spurn these poor enticements—these vain delights. But I can no more!—when I would urge these solemn counsels, I seem to be proffering an eternal adieu—and a last adieu of Osmond, I could never take, and live! I will not believe, then, that this farewell is given. I will exist from day to day on illusions—I will cheat myself with expectations. Perhaps he will return! we have not

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absolutely parted for ever! who knows but, ere this day closes, I may see him again! This will I say to myself, when the sad morning dawns upon me, and repeat it in the mournful evening! I will —Again, this eternal *I!* Alas! how weak is suffering humanity! Yet, Osmond, think not of me! Think only of yourself, and your immortal soul—oh, save me that—spare me that! I feel as if I had volumes to say to you on this theme; but the pen falls from my hand, and in vain I attempt to resume it."

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CHAP. X.

We must be permitted to draw a veil over the succeeding year in Osmond's life. A year!—what a portion of inestimable value in the existence of that being who is commanded to work out his salvation, and to whom every interval of leisure is intrusted to him by his Divine Master, as a talent to be employed for that immortal purpose.

If by Osmond, that wicked servant who knew his Lord's will and did it not, the precious gift was wantonly, wilfully, most sinfully wasted—if, at first, remembering with contrition his deserted wife

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and child, trembling and reluctant, he paused upon the threshold of vice—at length rushed in, and took up in her loathsome dwelling his fixed habitation—if guilty (as too surely he was) in the violation of every moral duty, still the moment that witnessed his return to England was one that carried with it something of expiation.

He came back to his native land, ruined in health, impoverished in fortune! He came back, as he believed, to die—and there was none to succour him—none to greet him. His mother, Lady Ellen—his child—he knew nothing of any of them! He had been engaged in a career, in whose giddy whirl he had lost, not only every virtuous, but every human feeling. He awoke from this intoxication of reason, by finding him-

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self day by day getting worse in health —and driven by the threatened approach of that dread phantom, from which human nature instinctively revolts, to look round for some sheltering asylum, he resolved upon returning to his native land. There dwelt one—but of her he scarcely dared to think—yet of none did he so often think—comfort and pity were so mingled with her idea, that if he could but behold her again! What consolation dwelt in the bare surmise!

It was quite at the latter end of the summer, when Osmond, wearied and ill, both in body and mind, landed at Brighton.

He felt assured that he had nothing to fear from the chance of meeting his much injured wife, were he to proceed immediately to his usual town residence. In-

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dependently of the time of year being such as to preclude any chance of finding her there, he well understood the distase unfortunate circumstances would have given her to the metropolis.

But the conscious shame which waits upon misconduct, rendered him averse to shewing himself even to such of his servants as remained in the house during the absence of the family, and he determined upon remaining at Brighton at least for the present.

He began twenty times to write a letter to his mother; then he thought he would address it to Lady Ellen, for his mother was now in years, and it seemed so cruel to add to the sorrows of infirmity and decline! And what could he say of himself that would not inflict sorrow? Why should he write at all? why could

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he not die without molesting them? he asked himself.

Alas! it is an awful thing to die!—Awful to the good—but to the wicked! imagination recoils—the spirits sink—the trembling soul clings closer and closer to its perishable companion, when it apprehends that their disunion may plunge it into the dread unknown, so mysterious and so appalling!

If the measure of Osmond's mental sufferings were not yet complete, an unexpected incident on the following day revived ideas well calculated to augment it. It was the circumstance of his accidentally encountering Mr. Sackville in the street. For a moment they both involuntarily stopped; but, as if touched with a sudden recollection, Sackville, with a cold, ceremonious inclination of

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his head, almost immediately passed on. Had he levelled the most opprobrious reproaches upon him, he could not more severely have wounded the feelings of Osmond, than by this distant and cutting coolness. At first, the proud spirit his contempt had humiliated, rose in Osmond's support, and casting upon his receding form a look of indignation, she too passed on.

But the consciousness of deserving Sackville's contempt, with that of all honourable and upright men, for the part he had been known to act by one who, but for him, might long have been the pride and ornament of her family, was too potent, too present, to admit of his sheltering himself under the protection of a pride, that had so poor a basis to rest upon.

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He recalled the circumstances under which he and Sackville last had met; the intemperate, and little less than brutal language, which a blind and foolish jealousy had caused him to address to him, and the unbridled violence, that had converted his testimony of attachment for Caroline into an exhibition of passion, as disgusting to the spectator as it was disgraceful to himself. He remembered all this—and added to it the base and ungenerous light in which he must appear to Sackville, in his suffering the idiotic fury of his temperament to betray, as he too surely recollected his expressions *must* have betrayed, the guilty connexion that subsisted between him and the poor defenceless girl he was persecuting, till her very senses failed beneath the terror he in-

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spired. As he thus thought, it seemed to him lenient treatment that he had just received; the candour which, with all his faults, formed a principal feature in his character, compelling him to acknowledge, that it would have been but a justifiable testimony of the sentiments his conduct had been calculated to inspire, had Sackville passed him without any sort of notice whatever.

His remorse, united with the strong interest he felt to learn some intelligence of her, who could not be thought of without many pangs, rendered him so restless, that for more than an hour he wandered about that part of the town in which he had met Sackville, in the hope of seeing him again; in which case he believed, that under the influence of his present feelings, he should

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patiently brook any tokens of aversion, or even contempt to himself, provided he could by any means inveigle Sackville into conversation, and thus afford himself an opportunity of obtaining tidings of Caroline.

He was disappointed in his wishes: Sackville appeared no more that day. By the next, as might have been expected, the virtuous impulse, that would have prompted him to endure humiliation as one of the just consequences of his misconduct, had given place in Osmond's heart to a sense of shame, struggling with disdain, which made him, on perceiving Sackville approaching him in the street, at first shrink back, and half turn to avoid him, and then, as if determined upon braving

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out his own conscience, for that he well knew, was all he had to recoil from—he resolutely advanced towards him, quite prepared to answer with a corresponding demeanor on his side, the civil contempt he expected to encounter in Sackville's.

He was not mistaken. Sackville with the slightest possible notice passed him, as on the preceding day; but Osmond did not now, as then, yield to the dictates of penitence and contrition. He tried to persuade himself that he was insolently, and even ungratefully treated, by a man who had often partaken of his hospitality, and with whom he had once lived upon terms of the greatest intimacy. But vain was this endeavour—no sophistry could so grossly impose upon

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his understanding! He felt but too truly assured that he was estimated exactly according to his deserts.

It happened that, from the time Sackville became an object of avoidance to Osmond, he more constantly crossed his sight than any other person. Whenever they met, his behaviour was uniformly the same; and Osmond apparently never varied in the calm *hauteur* with which he answered to the other's distant salutation.

But it was in appearance only that he maintained this evenness of deportment. Internally he was the prey of the most conflicting sensations, whenever the sight of Sackville more powerfully recalled associations, that awoke the dark and terrible passions, which had stamped his destiny with so much suffering.

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It was at the end of a week from his arrival at Brighton, that one evening, after an oppressively sultry day, which had painfully increased the languor and dejection of his feelings, Osmond bent his steps towards the beach, to try and revive his drooping frame with the freshness of the sea breezes. He wandered on, as far from the town as possible, that he might escape from the observation which the air of superiority, still diffused over his altered person, infallibly attracted.

The day was declining into that sweet calm which precedes twilight—that fading away of light, in which the fanciful mind identifies the fleeting character of all things earthly. A delicious melancholy accompanies the musings of this holy hour, when they are the musings

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of the virtuous; and even to the erring and misguided mortal, there is something in it that speaks of pardon, and of peace. Osmond looked round him, and seeing that no one was near, he sat down upon the beach, and fixing his eyes upon the great work of God that was before him, insensibly his thoughts ascended to the contemplation of its Omnipotent Creator.

The propensity of the mind to assimilate with the most general reflections its own particular case, soon involved him in considerations, medicinal indeed to his diseased soul, but sharpened with the stings of a conscience, which had slumbered only to awake with additional power to torture. "Of what avail is it to me," he thought, as he gazed upon the boundless ocean, "of

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what avail is it to me to look upon this grand testimony of the Almighty's power? Have I not received in myself, in the talents, the opportunities, the blessings with which He enriched me, as noble an evidence of his existence? And what have I done with these mercies?—what but turned them into curses? Can I offer Him praise and admiration, whose life has been an outrage upon all His laws? Can I presume to ask His mercy, who had none upon the gentlest of his creatures?"

"Oh Ellen!—Caroline!"—and alternately each name suggested to him some scene of ungoverned passion, in which the tenderness and love he ought to have valued had been spurned by the savage fury, that now, in the bare recollection, made him odious even to himself.

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The bitterness of his contrition became almost overpowering, as his vivid imagination, intent upon torturing him, recalled to his remembrance, in rapid succession, these visions of the upbraiding past. He leaned his head upon his hand, and whilst tears of penitence stole down his cheeks, he felt, like the murderer in Hamlet, disposed to try

"What repentance can!"

Like him he could have asked,

"What can it not?"

And oh! how truly, in this moment, could he have exclaimed like him,

"O wretched state—O bosom black as death!
O limed soul! that, struggling to be free,
Art more engag'd! Help, angels, make assay!
Bow, stubborn knees, and heart with strings of steel,
Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe—"

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The cloud of his despair began to clear away beneath the beams of hope, which the genuine character of his penitence imparted; and somewhat composed in feeling, he at length rose, and pursued his solitary ramble by the shore.

The vehemence of his emotions having subsided, they gradually gave place to a mournfulness, which was soothing rather than oppressive. The stillness of the evening, only interrupted by the distant sound of children's voices at their sports upon the beach, the murmur of the waves, grand in their approach, but, like the delusions of life, passing away as soon as arrived—every thing that surrounded him was in unison with the tone of his mind, and melted him into a disposition to receive the impressions of virtue.

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He was still proceeding, when his meditations were slightly interrupted by perceiving, on turning his head at the sound of approaching footsteps, that some solitary wanderer, like himself, had escaped from the immediate vicinity of the town, to indulge in a more lonely ramble.

He turned to resume his way homewards, and being then close upon the person who had disturbed his reverie, he perceived, with the agitation which the sight of him always inspired, that it was Mr. Sackville. The impulse of the latter appeared to be, as usual, to pass him, with a slight acknowledgment of recognition; but, to Osmond, the moment seemed to be come when, if ever, he must make his advantage of it,

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to obtain the intelligence of Caroline, which, with an anxiety that at times was almost agony, he desired to receive.

He arrested, therefore, the evident intention of Sackville to pass on, by himself stopping, and making some casual remarks upon the beauty of the evening, and other common-place topics.

It was the first time Sackville had had such an opportunity of remarking the visible and woeful change that had taken place in Osmond's appearance, since last they were upon terms of social intercourse; and, however unfavourably disposed to consider him, it was next to impossible for him to contemplate him so "fallen from his high estate," without some feelings of an affecting nature.

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It was almost an involuntary remark to say that "he was sorry to see him look so unwell."

"I am very unwell, indeed!" replied Osmond.

Mr. Sackville made some slight inquiry as to the nature of his complaint.

"Oh! it is here!—it is only here!" he exclaimed, as he laid his hand upon his heart.

There was something in this action, and in the melancholy, and paleness, and dejection, that pervaded his countenance, so moving, that it would have seemed inhuman, Sackville thought, to repel the inclination Osmond evinced of entering into conversation with him.

He joined him, therefore, in his return homewards, alleging, as an excuse for doing so, "that he was himself an in-

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valid, and he believed it would be prudent for him to follow his example in not further extending his walk."

It was with a gleam of joy that Osmond accepted his proposal. Now he should obtain his wishes,—now, at last, he should hear of her! But how to introduce a subject, which but to name was to suggest ideas of his own infamy, he knew not;—yet it must be introduced—for to go on frittering away these precious moments, in the trivial remarks which Sackville was addressing to him for the first five minutes after they joined each other, was to torture himself into a state almost of insanity. He could think only of one thing—he could listen to no other—and, having returned to Sackville's common place observations such abrupt and hurried replies as

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plainly indicated he scarcely heard, and certainly gave them no attention, he suddenly, with breathless eagerness, turned to him, and unknowing what he could add to such a remark,—"When last we met, Mr. Sackville," he said—and then he paused.

It was a pause that Sackville did not immediately interrupt. He seemed, as he felt, considerably astonished that Osmond should *venture* upon any allusion to a subject, which it would be so much for his own credit to bury in the deepest oblivion.

The scorn and indignation which the indisposition and spiritless appearance of Osmond had somewhat propitiated, arose again with the train of remembrances which this observation excited; and beholding him no more as the fine,

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manly-spirited being he had once known, subdued by suffering, and presenting, in his shrunk and drooping form, a miserable memento of the frailty of every human advantage, he saw in him now the betrayer of innocence—the selfish seducer—the man of savage passions—the destroyer of family peace!—and with a coldness which bespoke the aversion that filled his soul, he merely replied,

"It will be better to forget the circumstances under which we last met, Mr. Lessingham."

But Osmond had broken the barriers of reserve—he had resolved upon gratifying his wishes; and no coolness—no contempt, however cutting, could have interposed an obstacle to his obeying the distates of his inclination.

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"I cannot forget them—I do not wish, I do not try; I think only of Caroline! Tell me, Mr. Sackville, where is she—how is she?"

"She is alive!" Mr. Sackville calmly replied; and though Osmond's speaking countenance betrayed the impatience with which he expected the words he might add to these—he ceased—and said no more.

Osmond turned away impetuously for a moment; but instantly resuming the subject,

"I know that I am despicable to you," he said; "I am odious to myself—but have pity on me—do not trifle with me. I am a desperate man—tell me truly how is she?"

Mr. Sackville still paused in his re-

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ply: and Osmond, in the fire of his temper, began to utter expressions of haste and anger, which the other quietly interrupted.

"I have not now to learn, Mr. Lessingham, that you are accustomed to be obeyed in your wishes; but it may be necessary to hint to you, that I should be but little disposed to yield to violence, what it might seem to me prudent to withhold even from temperate intreaty."

Osmond remained a short time silent, under an impression that he was compromising his dignity, by suffering his inclination to place him in a situation that subjected him to the reproofs of Mr. Sackville; but again those inclinations prevailed, and perceiving that,

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if he desired to succeed in his purpose; he must adopt somewhat of Sackville's own calmness, he apologized for any warmth of expression he might have addressed to him, assuring him, and with truth, that such was his anxiety to learn some intelligence of the Lascelles' family, that it wore rather the character of a passion than a wish.—"Tell me, therefore, Mr. Sackville, if you have any compassion in you," he continued, "how is Caroline?"

"I have said she is alive," he replied, "and when I said that, I said perhaps more than may now be the truth."

Osmond visibly shuddered: which Sackville perceiving, he thus went on:

"I see that you are affected by this intelligence; but, pardon me, Mr. Lessingham, if I remark that her death was

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the slighest evil you had to apprehend, as the consequence of her unfortunate attachment to you."

Osmond said nothing, but sighed from the bottom of his heart.

"The death of the body is little," continued Sackville, "when put in competition with the death of all that renders life valuable and respectable—the death of innocence—of hope—of happiness—of esteem—of self-respect. Oh! Mr. Lessingham, what has that man to answer for, who murders these?"

"I did not destroy them without the offer of compensation," Osmond faintly replied; "but she rejected me—I saw that I had lost—" he could not—he dared not make the assertion that trembled on his tongue.

It was well he did not, for Sackville's

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reply told him how little it would have been credited.

"You would not say that you *really* believed you had lost your influence with her?" he said; "so wholly lost it, that no intreaties, no supplications on your part, would have induced her to accept your hand in marriage?"

"I was unfortunately not of a disposition to offer these supplications," Osmond haughtily replied.

"Yet they had not been spared, perhaps, upon other occasions," Sackville, with some severity remarked.

"You are too—" free, Sir—Osmond had nearly said; but he changed the word into "*severe.*"

"You must again pardon me," replied Sackville, "if I say that upon this subject I can scarcely express myself in

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terms that could be considered as too severe—feeling, and knowing what I do."

"It is usual, I well know," he continued, "for the world to gloss over these faults in our sex, especially when rank and fashion sanctify them. The world may the more readily do this, because there are but few, in that extensive place, to whose lot it falls to perceive the full effects of such misconduct in men. There are few who, like me, have seen a lovely and innocent girl—the more than common pride of a more than commonly united and affectionate family—the idol of a fond and virtuous father—there are few who have seen such a creature as this, passing through the gradations of suffering, by which an unsuspecting and loving woman is first betrayed, then contemned—then de-

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serted—till, led from sorrow to sorrow, she finds at last her resting-place in the grave which her deceiver has prepared for her—there are few—" he was proceeding with an energy, which his interest in the cause he was supporting rendered of a powerful kind, but Osmond, who, during this address, had manifested symptoms of extreme anguish, here interrupted him, with a passionate exclamation for his forbearance.

"I can hear no more; you need not tell me that I am a villain! But I suffer; yes—yes—do not fear but what I suffer, Sir!" He was obliged to pause a few moments—his distress was such, that Sackville half repented the severity with which he had applied himself to work upon passions so terrible in their vehemence.

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He was beginning some expressions of a conciliatory and advising nature: but Osmond, who seemed to have been musing for a few moments, suddenly exclaimed, "You think she yet lives!"

"She *was* alive when I last heard from Woodhurst, a few days since."

"I will see her then before she dies—I will implore her pardon! Oh, that I could die in her stead! But at her feet I will pour out my repentance—I will—" He added no more, but wringing the hand of Sackville—who stood in pitying silence as he watched the turbulent emotions which seemed to tear his very frame asunder—he darted from him, and hurrying to his hotel, in less than an hour he was pursuing his way to Woodhurst.

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CHAP. XI.

But by the time he had arrived there, the burst of indignation, which would have led him instantly to rush into the presence of Caroline to supplicate her pardon, had in some measure subsided; and, though still bent upon seeing her, he was now sufficiently calmed in his intentions, to consider a little upon the best possible means of putting them in execution. It occurred to him, that through the medium of Mary Ellis, the woman who had frequently been their mutual confidante in his connexion with

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Caroline, he might arrive at the accomplishment of his wishes.

The first evening, therefore, after his arrival, he went down to her cottage to talk with her upon the subject.

All the events of the past year—indeed all the events of his life, excepting those which were associated with the thought of Caroline—faded away, as, in bending his steps to this well-known haunt, he gave himself up to the recollection of all he had once felt for her.

"What I *once* felt!" he repeated to himself, "oh, ever, ever dear, when was thy loveliness forgotten? The world and many sorrows have usurped a sad dominion over me since last we met; but fond ideas are still buried in my bosom, and at the touch of memory how do they start again into existence!

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"Here—here it was we paused," he continued in painful musing, as he rested at a gate that opened upon a churchyard of the most romantic beauty; "here it was we stood, the first evening I walked with her, after I had declared to her my attachment. Upon this gate we leaned—to that church I pointed. And there, dearest," I said, "shall we offer up our mutual vows—Blissful hour—when shall it come, my Caroline?"

The smile, the blush, the modest pleasure which that charming face betrayed! Did he not see it again? Was she not near him now? Had they ever parted?

The illusions of imagination became so strong, that almost he could have persuaded himself that he had slept, and that a fearful dream alone had occupied

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his fancy, and that she was still his betrothed wife; but the sad reality was too, *too* present! Deeply sighing, he sunk again into mournful rumination. "Here it was," he thought, "that I repeated to her those sweet lines of the poet—

"Mine be a cot beside a hill."

And she wished to hear them again; and we sat down upon this bank.

"But why should I dwell on visions such as these?" he asked himself: "are not the substantial woes of life sufficient at this moment? Alas! it should seem as if my insatiable fancy hungers and thirsts after suffering, since, in the midst of wretchedness, it is incessantly seeking some new cause for sorrow!"

At length he tore himself away from

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the contemplation of objects, that only ministered to diseased imagination, and directed his steps to the cottage of Mary Ellis.

She testified great surprise and joy at the sight of him; but on his eager questions respecting Caroline, it quickly subsided, and nothing could he for some time obtain from her but heavy sighs, and exclamations of grief.

"For God's sake, Mary," said he, "tell me at once—is she dead?—Speak."

She shook her head. "Not dead, Sir, but—"

"Thank God!" he exclaimed.

"Alas!" said she, "there is not much to be thankful for, on poor Miss Carry's account; for she can't live, poor thing, I should think, another week."

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He could only reply to this intelligence by a deep groan, which so moved her pity, that she attempted to give him some hope.

"But don't be so much cast down, Mr. Osmond," said she, "for while there's life there's hope; and we have thought it impossible she should live another week for the last three months."

"Has she been ill only so long?" said he, catching at the hope that a disorder of so short a duration might yet be within the power of medical aid to conquer.

"Bless you! she has been ill this twelvemonth, I believe I may say ever since you went away, Sir. I always said that was her death-stroke, poor thing! It's a pity people should ever attempt

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to cross true love; but the poor old gentleman has paid for his hard-heartedness in interfering between you."

"He was not to blame," Osmond had nearly pronounced; but his interest in her narration suspended a sense of justice, and he listened with fixed attention, as she volubly proceeded: "He has had no luck in his farm, or any thing, ever since, Sir; and has seemed to take no pleasure like in business, but he goes moping about—"

"But, Caroline," said he, "have they no hope? what is her complaint?"

"Oh, her complaint is the broken heart—and there's no cure for that, you know. They have tried every thing, and Miss Lascelles has been with her every where; and sometimes she has been a little better, and then worse

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again: and they took her to the sea, but that did no good—and then they took her to some place where people go to drink hot water: I forget the name."

"Clifton, perhaps?"

"Yes; that was the name: and there she was, ever so long—better and worse—better and worse; but sure, herself, that she should never get over it, and so melancholy, and constantly craving to come home—and so they brought her back: and now she says she shall die in peace, amongst her dear brothers and sisters! Poor thing! 'tis heart-breaking to see such a young creature so sorrowful! But don't take on so, Mr. Osmond. It's my belief that if they would let you see her, you would do her more good than all the doctors in the world. I am going down there, presently, for I sit

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up with her those nights that Miss Lascelles goes to bed—and I'll just tell her, gently, shall I, that you—"

"Oh, for God's sake, no," he exclaimed, alarmed for the possible consequences to her exhausted frame—"Yet, not to see her before she dies! if she *must* die; but, perhaps not—you think she may recover—you think there is hope?"

"I am almost afraid," and she shook her head: "but one cannot say, she alters so much!"

"Ah, why should I seek to deceive myself!" said Osmond; and he sunk into silence, revolving in his mind the possibility of obtaining one more interview with her before they were parted for ever. "Did you ever—have you

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ever heard her mention me?" at last he falteringly brought out.

"I can't exactly say I have," she replied, after some hesitation; "but that's nothing—for young ladies are shy in talking of such things, you know, Sir! But you are her true love, still, Sir, I can answer for it; and she thinks of you very often, I am pretty certain! for once, and it was only the other night, when she was restless and wakeful, I heard her sigh, and I looked at her—but her eyes were closed, and her hands clasped together upon her bosom; and she seemed to be praying like, for her lips moved, and she said something about Osmond."

"Oh, spare me," he exclaimed—"yet, go on—but I cannot bear it—I

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cannot bear it;" and he rushed from the room, to obtain an interval for the free indulgence of his labouring emotions.

But his soul seemed to hang upon the hope of seeing her once more; and he returned to talk with Mary upon the possibility of gratifying it.

"Tell her as slowly—as gently as possible—but stay—I will write, and do you use the utmost caution in giving it to her."

She promised him the greatest prudence in delivering the following lines, which he scrawled with a hand so tremulous, that it could scarcely hold the pencil with which he wrote.

"I come not to agitate, or disturb, dear love—I come to supplicate your pardon.—Once—but once—my Caroline look upon me again—if it be but for

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a moment! I am weighed down with sorrows—refuse me not this last request—my dearest, refuse it not to the unfortunate "OSMOND."

Mary took the note, promising to use her utmost influence in promoting its success, and to return to him with such tidings as she had to bring, with all expedition.

His feelings during her absence, which was more than two hours, may be imagined, but all description would be useless in attempting to pourtray their intensity; and when at last he heard her approaching, and saw her enter the room, he had not the power to ask her what news she brought.

But her countenance proclaimed, before her words, that she had been successful in her mission.

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"Miss Curry will see you, Mr. Osmond," she exclaimed, as soon as she had recovered sufficient breath to speak intelligibly. "I knew she would—I was sure she would—at last."

"She was averse to it, then, at first?"

"She was sadly overcome, poor thing—and clasped her hands together, and said, 'What can I do?—what *can* I do?'—and cried so, it made my heart ache to see her; and I almost repented telling her any thing about it; but when she grew a little quieter, she seemed to think for a while—and then she says, 'ask my father to come and speak to me;'—so I went for him, and he came, and Miss Lascelles—and they were altogether talking a long time; and as I stood in the next room waiting, I heard

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Miss Carry say, 'I wish to die in peace with all the world—and we parted uncomfortably—I think it would comfort me to see him,'—and master said, 'Well, my love, do what is for your own peace,'—or something to that purpose—and then he came out, and I heard him say, as he stood at the door—'I cannot see him, Carry'—and she said—'No, no—I will see him alone,'—and so then she bid me to say that to-morrow evening at seven she would receive you.'"

So overpowered was he by the conflicting sensations that had so long agitated him, that it was something of a relief to have the anxious hour of meeting a little longer protracted; and Mary having promised to conduct him at the appointed time the next evening to the

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presence of Caroline, he left her, and returned home, in the hope of composing his mind by an interval of quiet and repose.

But repose was not for Osmond! He passed a sleepless night—a disturbed and restless day—and repaired to his appointment with spirits ill adapted to sustain the trial that awaited them.

Several times, as he walked over the well-remembered ground that led to the habitation of Mr. Lascelles, he was constrained to pause to recover himself; and more than once did his simple-hearted companion turn upon him pitying looks and glistening eyes, and try, by some encouraging assurance, to keep him in what she called "good heart."

But when he got within sight of the house, and when he stood at the thresh-

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old of the back entrance to it, whilst Mary preceded him, to announce his arrival, his agitation was such, that he thought it would be impossible for him to support an interview, and he was almost thinking of returning home.

However, at this instant his guide returned to him. She said something, he knew not what—but he followed her. He entered a room—he heard a door close after him—he saw a form in white—he cast himself on his knees before it—he pressed his lips upon a burning hand—and he uttered the name of "Caroline!"—but till tears relieved him, he could say no more.

At length he raised his head to look at her, and clasped his hands, and with looks—for words were still denied him—supplicated her pardon.

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"I do forgive you—my poor Osmond—I do—I do"—she repeated, as she pressed her lips upon his throbbing forehead.

He tried to say, "God bless you!"—but in vain! He felt as if he was dying—so overwhelmed—so oppressed with anguish!

He rose, and cast himself into a chair by her side, and there gave long and unrestrained vent to his strong emotions. Exhausted to a state of female weakness, he could not, for some time, even attempt to speak. But he was near her—and he held her to his heart—and incessantly he kissed away her tears—and it was a foretaste of Heaven, as, he believed, which in that moment he experienced.

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It was only when he turned to gaze upon the beautiful shadow which his arms encircled, that a pang of sorrow darted through his soul! Then—then he remembered what had brought him there! It was no lovely Caroline—full of youth, and health, and happiness, he came to behold; but a poor penitent, wasted with misery—fading away—dying—ah! too true!—Dying, indeed! but never did death so tenderly approach his victim—Touched, but not extinguished, were her exquisite charms; they borrowed from her sufferings a captivation, that had nothing mortal in it; and in the days of his most impassioned admiration, never was she so beautiful to his imagination as now.

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That heavenly face was pale and hollow—not a tint of colour tinged its lily whiteness. But the eyes!—the melting blue eyes!—no sorrow had power to rob them of their loveliness; once—and once only, as they were raised to his, a gleam of affection broke from them, and their radiant brightness told of what they had been in her happier days; but again they fell beneath their heavy lids, and became but half visible. Yet what did they not disclose! Did ever the expression of the "human face divine" betray such earnest—such devout—such soul-subduing penitence? Suffused they were in tears, and the tears stole from them so gently, and they rested on her cheek—such eloquent tokens—oh, what a countenance it was!

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No need was there of words to speak of her repentance!

But these words came:

"You see me, Osmond, now," she said, "as all human beings must at the last be seen—subdued by a sense of guilt, and only to be comforted by those hopes of mercy which the goodness of God holds out to poor penitent creatures."

She paused awhile to recover strength to proceed, for she was evidently in the last stage of weakness; and dreading lest she should accelerate the fatal hour by unwonted exertion, Osmond implored her not to attempt to converse with him.

"I see you once more, my dear, dear love," said he, fondly pressing her to his

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bosom; "and you have granted me your forgiveness—and it is enough—do not—"

"Yes, Osmond—I must—I must—" she replied; "I have much to say to you—the time is short, and my strength fails. Listen to me—look at this ring, Osmond."

It was the same that he had placed upon her finger, when with idle, fatal mockery, he tried to pervert her innocent mind into a belief, that it was the badge of a union as solemn and indissoluble in the sight of Heaven as any they could form.

"Since the day you placed it there," she continued, "it never has been removed—but now I restore it to you again;" and she drew it from her own, to place it upon his finger. "I give it

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to you back, as a token of my forgiveness, and of my love: for you were my first and only love, Osmond—I never knew another; and but for the unfortunate—but no more of that—it is long, very long since I have ceased to remember your faults—and you have suffered for them;" and she paused to look at him—then sighing deeply, "poor Osmond, the world has used you unkindly!" she said.

He could not speak—but his mournful sighs sufficed to confirm her pitying doubts.

"Poor Osmond!—poor, dear Osmond!" she repeated, once or twice, with an accent of the deepest concern: "Alas! you are indeed changed since last we met! And is there no source of consolation left you?—no domestic happiness!"

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"Oh none—none," he exclaimed, and he was about to pour forth the history of his separation from his wife—but he restrained himself.

"Let us talk only of you, my Caroline," he said; "*your* feelings—*your* state of mind—tell me that they are happy—and you will impart to me all the comfort I can now experience."

"I am now at peace, Osmond," she said; "oh if I could but depart with a hope that *your* last hours would be devout and tranquil, and that hereafter we may meet again, where no fierce passions—no human frailties shall have power to separate us! My dear—dear love, pray that you may not enter into temptation—pray that your sins may be forgiven you—think that with my last breath I besought you to turn from the

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error of your ways—my own dear Osmond—" but tears interrupted her, and it was long before she had power to proceed.

It was long before Osmond had capacity to listen. His mortal feelings were wrought to a pitch of painful excitement, almost beyond endurance—he groaned with misery. He besought the Almighty to release him from his sorrows.

"Oh, my Father!" he exclaimed, "take me to thy mercy!—take me with my Caroline!"

But she interrupted him, she implored him not thus heavily to mourn—nor to despond—"believe in Him—trust in Him, and he will comfort you," she said. "Truly may I say, in the words of that book which is my consolation night and day,

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'Come hither, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul! for I was in darkness—in the depth of despair.' Oh, Osmond, from that day—that fatal day, in which you put to silence with specious arguments my better judgment—from that guilty hour in which I strayed from virtue—never, till last night, have I known an interval of peace. The consciousness of sin devoured me with a remorse so agonizing, that times innumerable I felt as if I must acknowledge my secret, for the sake of obtaining some consolation for the anguish of my heart; and nothing but the horror of bringing shame and dishonour upon my dear family, restrained me from throwing myself at my father's feet, and confessing to him all. It was the wretchedness of

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my mind that seemed to turn my heart from you, Osmond. It turned me indeed from every thing but one tremendous, dreadful thought—I had sinned against God, and deceived my father; waking and sleeping this idea pursued me with unremitting tortures;—my health declined—I was certain that I could not live; I felt assured that human nature, however long resisting, must eventually be subdued by such sufferings as mine! Oh, they were indeed sufferings!"

She ceased a little while, and raised her eyes to Him who alone knew their nature and extent: "if they have but expiated!" she said—then turning to Osmond with a faltering voice, "I tried to sanctify them," she faintly articulated.

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"And you *have* sanctified them, my love," he replied; "do not thus distress yourself by resorting—"

"Nay, hear me yet a little longer, Osmond—I shall soon be silent. Hear how He has comforted me at the last. I still went on thus miserable; my guilty secret preying on my soul, and poisoning every effort after peace—yes, even the efforts of devotion itself—for religion told me, however penitent, that I was still deceiving my father. Osmond, if you knew—if you could imagine what I felt, when, as I grew worse and worse, he used to weep over me, and caress me so fondly—and ask me over and over again what he could do for me?"

"My dear Caroline, let me beseech you, do not—" alas, he wanted the com-

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fort he would have given! but it was in vain to entreat her not to recur to this painful topic. Though impeded every instant by emotion, she *would* proceed.

"At last I determined that I would tell him all; and I read over the parable of the Prodigal Son; and I prayed very fervently for strength to fulfil this good purpose: and I repeated to myself continually, in the words of the Psalmist, 'I will confess my wickedness, and be sorry for my sin;' and other texts from Scripture, which, whenever I came to in my reading, struck me to the heart, and seemed to my fancy like a warning and direction from the Almighty. But still, Osmond, my heart failed me, and I sunk from my resolution as often as I made it, and I fell into deeper

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and deeper despondency—praying, and weeping, imploring the direction of Heaven, yet shrinking from it, though I saw it plainly offered; and when I should have found strength and grace to follow its guidance, I know not, if the good God of mercy had not sent you hither, and I bless him for it! and you too, my love—yes, I bless you for it, my Osmond!" and she pressed her lips to his cheek.

He strained her to his bosom—his feelings agonized with tenderness and pity.

She leaned upon his shoulder many minutes, for the fatigue of speaking had much exhausted her—but though silent, her sweet looks were full of eloquence, and her smiles bespoke a calmness, almost a happiness that already seemed

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to emanate from that brighter world to which she was hastening.

As soon as she was a little recovered, she reverted again to the subject which appeared to occupy her whole soul.

"Last night—" said she, "last night, as soon as I had read your note, Osmond, I received it as the final warning from Heaven! Here is an opportunity to speak, I thought; doubtless it will be the last. I will not suffer it to pass away unimproved. I will ease my soul by a full confession to my dear injured father, and die in peace—and I did it, Osmond!"

"You did, Caroline?"

"Yes, I did. I first upon my bended knees supplicated my Heavenly Father to be with me in my trial, and to support and strengthen me in passing

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through it. Blessed be his name! he heard me! he surely heard, and granted my prayer, for I rose so calm, Osmond!"

"Oh, my God!" he exclaimed, "dost Thou not speak to me by the mouth of this thy creature? Caroline, my sainted love! can you not teach me where to find this heavenly calm? oh, pray for me."

She pressed his hand to her heart, and raised her eyes—but she did not, she could not speak. They neither of them could.

"And your father! my love?" at last he said.

"He came to me," she replied, "as was usual with him, to sit with me a little while before I retired for the night. I had but just risen from my knees, and

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tears were still upon my cheeks. He thought that the anticipation of seeing you disturbed me, and he endeavoured to dissuade me from an interview; but I assured him he was mistaken. 'Then what is it, my darling, that distresses you so much to-night?' he said; 'tell me, my Carry, is it any thing your father can remove?' And he kissed me, and clasped me to his heart. Oh, Osmond, what I felt in that moment! I trembled to an excess that visibly alarmed him. He sat down, still holding me in his arms. 'What *can* this mean?' he said, as, leaning on his bosom, I sobbed as if my heart would break; and, indeed, Osmond, I thought that it would. I believed that I was actually dying, and with that solemn idea no other could be joined. But he called for assistance,

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and they gave me something, and I grew better; and I begged them to leave me alone with him—and once more I lifted up my heart to God; and then I threw myself at my father's feet, and I told him all! I told him all!" she repeated.

"And he execrated the wretch that had—"

"He felt it like a father!" she replied. "But he execrated neither of us: he looked at me with reproach, indeed, but it was only for a little space—'I did not look for this!' was all he said.—'It has pleased Providence to try me with misfortunes, and I have endeavoured to bear them; but I did not look for this!' and then he would have turned away from me,—but I held him in too firm a grasp. I clung to him, Osmond; I

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clasped his dear hands—I covered them with kisses—I would not be cast away from him—I *would not*."

"And could he be relentless? could he be unforgiving?" exclaimed Osmond, as he looked upon her, and beheld the divine expression that irradiated her face.

"No—no;" she replied, "not long—not long did he turn away from me. 'I am going from you, my father,' I said, 'a day—an hour, may separate us.—See these hands—this form—how wasted they are! Look at me, dear father—your poor, dying Caroline!' And he did look at me, Osmond; and then he put his arms round my neck—and he burst into tears; and we wept together a great while."

Osmond was affected to a degree of agony by the simple eloquence of this

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narration; but he could have been content thus to have suffered yet longer, had not the terrible exhaustion of Caroline now alarmed him so much, that he almost feared he should have to call for assistance.

"I shall be better soon," she replied to his anxious expressions; "I have said all; now I shall die happy."

She endeavoured to say something more—but her efforts were fruitless; she gasped for breath. Osmond uttered a cry of alarm; but she smiled upon him, and his apprehensions subsided as the paroxysm abated.

At this moment the door was gently opened. He saw no one, for his eyes were bent only upon one object, till Caroline's joyful exclamation, 'He comes! I knew he would—to bless me, and to

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grant my wish!" directed his attention to the approach of Mr. Lascelles.

"Forgive him—my father, let me hear you say that you forgive him," she said, pointing to Osmond.

He was supporting her in his arms; but he turned a supplicating look on Mr. Lascelles, who, for a moment only, hid his face as if the sight of him was too painful to behold.

"For her dear sake, good Sir," said Osmond.

Mr. Lascelles extended his hand to him; he laboured to speak—but he shook his head—the effort was not to be made.

Osmond retained his hand—he knelt at his feet: he continued to repeat, "for her dear sake, alone—not for mine—say only 'I forgive.'"

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"I do forgive you," at last Mr. Lascelles pronounced. "God will, I trust, forgive you, too—and all of us."

Osmond pressed his hand to his lips—but he was speechless! His sweet girl clasped him to her heart—"it is enough," said she—now, now—blessed Lord!" and she sunk down in her chair. Osmond flew to support her—he laid her head upon his bosom. Mr. Lascelles stood at the other side of her, holding her hand, and bending over her with looks of unspeakable affection. For several minutes she continued in this state, labouring to speak, but incapable of utterance. Her father vainly endeavoured to soothe her into quietude.

She smiled upon him, as he kissed her cheek—she then looked up at Osmond! It was the last look! pitying—tender—

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loving. "Farewell! bless—" she faintly murmured—and her head declined again upon his bosom. He felt it heavier and heavier—his hand was tremulously grasped—she sighed deeply. He looked at her—he saw the sweet eyes closing! —closing! a gentle smile dwelt upon the lips. He heard the faint cry of the poor father—but he heard no more, for he was constrained to hasten from the room, to preserve his own senses from failing him.

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CHAP. XII.

The following day brought Mary Ellis to wait upon Osmond with sad intelligence, and but too faithfully anticipated by his fears.

Caroline had departed during the night—her last words had been addressed to him—for after she had fainted in his arms, though she lived some hours, she had spoken no more.

For more than a fortnight after this distressing event Osmond never left his room, and scarcely his bed. The perturbation of his mind, acting upon his already weakened frame, threw him into

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so violent a fever, that for many days he believed (and in this hour of excitement it was a consolatory belief) that he should soon follow the poor departed Caroline to the grave.

But, as he grew a little better, the awful thoughts and salutary emotions which the affecting scene he had so recently witnessed had excited in his mind, began to exert a religious influence over him: This was partly, perhaps, to be ascribed to his present state of exhaustion, both mental and bodily, but still doubtless, in a great degree, resulting from that mysterious working, by which the great disposer of events is able to subdue all things unto himself.

His unfitness for death was a consideration that came before him in terrible array! The tender monitions of his

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dying Caroline—the solemn supplication of Lady Ellen to save his immortal soul—every remembrance was fraught with the most awful counsels; and, "what must I do to be saved?" was a question which the trembling sinner in the Gospel did not more urgently propose, than did this poor, suffering, penitent every hour of his desolate existence. To think of Lady Ellen was to think of peace—and again did Osmond, again did he recur to the hope of being restored to her, who, he believed, alone could administer to the anguish of his afflicted and dying soul.

But in vain he attempted to write to her! As often as he began, the pen fell from his trembling hand, and with heavy groans of despair he abandoned the fruitless attempt—anxiously as he

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pined after a restoration to her affection, he had magnanimity enough, he thought, to despise what he considered might bear the appearance of a pusillanimous spirit; a spirit that, in its distress, was abject enough to court the sympathy and tenderness, which in the full-blown triumph of its guilty career it had voluntarily abandoned.

"No, I cannot do it!" he exclaimed, casting away for the last time the pen which had so often been taken up for these fruitless efforts. "I will go to her—and if she spurns me from her with disdain, I will not reproach her—I will think it just—and seek some hovel, where, in desolate penitence, I may make my peace with Heaven."

He left Woodhurst and returned to town, and dreading the vacillation of

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his disturbed mind, he would not suffer himself to lose a moment in contriving the means of an interview, but giving himself up to the desperation that governed him, he the same evening proceeded to Richmond. He did not, however, immediately resort to the presence of Lady Ellen, but availing himself of the twilight of an autumnal evening, he stole from the inn at which he arrived, to indulge himself in looking upon the habitation that contained her.

There it stood before him! There was the viranda in which she loved to pass the last hour of a summer's evening—the roses, the jessamine, the clematis that so luxuriantly shaded it, he recognized again! He traced her elegant mind every where—nothing was wanting but her own fair, delicate form, to

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complete the charm of quietude and peace that reigned round the whole.

He stood very long at a little low gate, which was one of the entrances to the premises, in a state of musing, rather pensive than sad. It seemed as if the meekness of Ellen diffused a portion of calmness to all that came within her influence. In vain he essayed to quit the spot—in vain did reason suggest the hazard of his being discovered by some of the domestics, and the embarrassment that must follow such a circumstance. He walked away again and again, but it was only to return! At last, he left it—but not far had he proceeded, when he was recalled by the sound of music, which sweetly broke "the stillness of night;" for so long had he lingered, that evening had wholly

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faded away, and night, in all the warmth and richness of September, with her moon of beauty, now prevailed.

He returned to pause again at the gate, and to listen to sounds that seemed to steal upon the heart rather than the senses. He was too far off to distinguish the words—but the air, so simple, so devotional!—could he ever forget it? Could he forget how often, in such a night as this, Lady Ellen sung to him her evening hymn, and in the mere listening to her, the world had seemed to pass away with all its delusions, and he had felt as if to die beside her in that hour of virtuous emotion, would have been all that the heart could ask.

Sacred moments! though absent, they were not lost to his remembrance—they

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visited him again—his wife restored them to him—the very sound of her voice gave them back to him once more.

He sought not to restrain the impulse which prompted him still nearer to approach her. With cautious steps and suspended breath, less anxious to avoid discovery, of which he thought not, than solicitous to catch every note that floated towards him, he entered the garden—he stole towards the viranda—he was now within a few yards of her—he could distinguish the words she sung—how well did he remember them!—Quite unawares, he found himself advancing till he was at the very verge of the apartment. The window was open, and he could distinctly see her; the light from the candles, while it made her visible, protected him from dis-

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covery, and he gazed upon her with the same feelings of sublime tenderness with which he would have contemplated an angel. She was seated at the piano-forte, which now and then she touched, accompanying her voice in the most light and beautiful manner. But the mere mechanism of a performance was entirely lost in the *mind* —the spirituality, which diffused something far beyond beauty over her whole form—the uplifted eyes—the smile that played round the lips—the love—the adoration—the holiness of its expression —what depth—what earnestness—what comfort of devotion it displayed!

It was with difficulty Osmond restrained himself from rushing in, and kneeling at her feet, and imploring her to pray for him!

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She ceased—but the sounds still vibrated upon his ear: his eyes were still rivetted upon her. He made no effort to retire: he seemed to have forgotten how he came there, and how he was either to go away, or to manifest his presence; every thing was absorbed in the enthusiasm she had inspired.

He longed to speak to her. He did not—he could not believe, guilty as he was, and dishonourably as he had acted towards her—he could not believe, that one so pious—so raised above the world and all its deceitful hopes, would indulge any angry or disdainful emotions. He felt almost sure of her pity; and her pity was all he asked.

But in no manner could he then introduce himself to her without creating alarm; and it seemed a sort of sacrilege

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to disturb the sweet serenity, which made it almost happiness merely to contemplate her. Now and then, indeed, a shade of sadness came over her countenance, and once or twice she audibly sighed. For a few moments she leaned her head upon her hand, and mortal thoughts for a short interval appeared to struggle with divine.

"Yes," she said, removing the hand which concealed her face, and lifting it up with a melancholy smile, which spoke of fond remembrances, that *would* return—however dreaded, impossible to be repelled—"yes, it was such a night as this!" she continued. Then relapsing into her former attitude, she spoke no more.

Assured that the associations of memory had blended his idea with every

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note she had been singing, and equally convinced that, unworthy as he was, some gleams of tenderness still mingled in her recollection of him, Osmond could not any longer have refrained, but must inevitably have made himself known to her, whatever consequences had followed the disclosure, but that, with a sudden effort that startled him, she seemed visibly to shake off the impressions she was indulging, and hastily rising, she rung the bell, which signal was immediately obeyed by the entrance of her female servants. One of them placed before her mistress a Bible, and having seated themselves at a little distance from her, after a short silence she began to read to them.

There was something in the circumstances that surrounded him, which

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touched Osmond with emotions more soothing, more ennobling, than he ever remembered to have experienced.

The persuasive charm that hung upon the voice of Lady Ellen, breathing as it now did the words of everlasting life, fell upon his heart, refreshing it, as it were, indeed, "with the dew of heaven." It was the only sound that interrupted the repose of night; that solemn—that divine interval, in which the heart instinctively approaches, with trembling adoration, that great mysterious Being, who makes "darkness his pavilion." The day indeed is beautiful, and beaming with his bounty and his love! But night reveals Him in the full majesty of His power, arrayed in all His awful attributes. They seem to hover in the dark obscurity of nature!—what we

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are, and what we *have been*, and what we are to be hereafter!—vague—terrible impressions overpower us;—we pray—and then soft gleams of consolation break upon us, and we feel that our fate is in His hands—and that He is good and merciful! All that He has made bespeaks benevolence—we turn to consider "the Heavens, the work of His hands—the moon and the stars which He has ordained;" and our hearts are comforted with the trust they inspire.

Even Osmond, sinner as he was, imbibed a portion of holy hope, as he contemplated the silent eloquence of night and nature; and joined the sacrifice of a "broken and contrite spirit," with the supplication of that suffering being who was kneeling in his view; for she had finished reading, and was

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now concluding her act of worship with a prayer.

Ah, little did she know who it was that united his petitions to hers! Little did she anticipate, when she besought the Almighty to "bring back to His flock all those who had strayed in the paths of error, and to shed the light of His truth upon their sinking hearts,"—little did she foresee the fervour of sincerity with which this supplication would be echoed, by one of those poor wanderers for whom she so piously intreated!

He was yet kneeling—subdued—and almost prostrate on the ground, scarcely conscious that there was silence—that she had concluded—and that the servants had departed—when the sound of the window closing alarmed him, not

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with a fear of discovery, but with a dread that he should be obliged to retreat unnoticed; and to have gone without speaking to her, now that their hearts had been engaged in such unknown, but sweet communion, he felt to be impossible.

The vehemence of his agitation, during the time she had been engaged in her devotions, had compelled him to retire to a greater distance, lest it should betray him, and occasion her alarm. But he was still within the viranda, though concealed by a large stand of plants and flowers that occupied it.

She had half closed the window, and he felt every instant upon the point of darting forth from his place of concealment; but he stood restrained by varying emotions.

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She lingered still at the window—her soft eyes raised to Heaven—and looking upon the bright moon, as if she traced in its mild and lovely light, the visions of departed happiness.

She pronounced, as she continued to gaze upon it—yes, she surely did—she pronounced his name!

"Osmond!" he distinctly heard her say, "Alas! how truly I could have loved him—I *could have loved!*—" she repeated, sighing deeply.

His responsive burst of feeling was not to be concealed. She heard his stifled groans, and uttering a faint exclamation of alarm, she was hastily retreating: but before she could recover her dismayed senses, he had seized her hand—he had thrown himself at her feet—he

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had pronounced her name—and she had discovered him!

Astonishment chained up every faculty but that of sight! Her eyes were bent upon the form indistinctly visible to her in the twilight; and, but for her fixed, devouring gaze, it might have been a marble statue which Osmond clung to, in that fair, cold, speechless being at whose feet he knelt.

"One word—only one word, Ellen, my wife!" he continued to repeat; whilst she, tortured by the ineffectual efforts she made to subdue the rising throng of powerful emotions, which rendered every attempt at speech as painful as it was unavailing—could only wave her hand, in token of her incapacity to give even the one word he asked for.

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As a signal of her just resentment—as a command to leave her—Osmond misconstrued her agitated gestures.

"I cannot, Ellen, I cannot leave you—I come to you for comfort—discard me not!" More he could not say, for he felt as if his heart would break. He hid his face upon the hand he held, to conceal his anguish, repeating in broken accents, "do not leave me—do not—"

"Leave you!" she did with difficulty utter—and at the bare surmise the anguish of her soul broke forth in floods of tears. The sweet promise that the very tone of her voice implied, penetrated to his inmost heart. He rose, and both with the same impulse extended their arms! That embrace of reconciliation cancelled to Lady Ellen all

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the past.—" Leave you, Osmond!" she repeated, as soon as language was permitted her—" what, when that hour is come, for which night and day I have prayed—so fervently prayed!" It was still in vain she attempted to discourse—her tears and sobs perpetually interrupted her; so, clasping to her bosom and to her lips his wasted, burning hand, she drew him, in a manner, into the room; and whilst Osmond, overpowered with recent illness and distress of mind, sunk down exhausted upon the sofa, in dejected smiles mingling with tears, looking the gratitude he could not speak—she took her station by his side—silent—but, oh, how eloquent! for where was the language that could have conveyed to her penitent husband half the sweet

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conviction of her entire forgiveness, and still tender love—as the fond gentleness with which she laid upon her bosom his aching head—wiped from his damp brow the drops of anguish, and from his streaming eyes the fast-falling tears Where was the assurance, that would have half so forcibly testified of pardon and peace as the half-uttered ejaculation of thankfulness, which her murmured, interrupted accents could not reveal, but which her raised eyes, overflowing with emotion, betokened her to feel—that the prayer so often offered up, had been at last heard—that he was before her—that he was returned—that he was restored to her again.

"Alas! my love!" said Osmond, observing these indications of joy, "I return only to bring you sorrow!—Look

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at me, Ellen:" and he put back from his pale forehead the dark clustering locks that shaded it. "Nay, do not start, dear love!" for, drawn by his earnestness to contemplate more intently a form, which as yet, however changed, had been beautiful and charming in her sight, as the long-lost form of Osmond, she instinctively pressed her hand before her eyes, with an exclamation of grief, as, for the first time, she perceived the dreadful alteration which the ravages of disease or sorrow had made in his once graceful person.

"Alas! you are very ill!" she tremblingly replied; her low imperfect accents announcing the unwillingness with which she suffered herself to allow, what she felt it would be in vain to deny.

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"I *have* been very ill," he replied; "I am better now."

"You are better now," she repeated with delight, catching at the hope his words might seem to justify—"oh, yes—yes—you are better now—and you will be better and better every day—I shall be near you, to nurse you and comfort you—and our sweet boy will be near you to be the pride of your heart! Oh, Osmond—you must try to love him—he is well worthy of your love."

"He *has* my love—my tenderest love," exclaimed Osmond, deeply affected with her tender praises of his child; "Dearest Ellen, ever in my eyes the best—the most respected of human beings—think not that insensibility to the blessings of my fate has driven me

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from you. It was not that, for in the most intoxicated moment of delusion, I knew your worth—God is my witness, I despised myself—that hapless wretch, whose fatal passions made it so valueless! But these wild impulses, they branded me with destruction at my birth—they—"

"No—no, said she, impatiently interrupting this sally, which so well reminded her of the yet unsubdued temperament of the impetuous Osmond; "they have misled, but they have not destroyed you."

"Ah, my Ellen," he replied, "contemplate me once more—these wasted limbs—these trembling hands! My wife, deceive not yourself or me—I am dying."

"God avert from me this evil!" she

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piously ejaculated; then, after a short interval, in which she seemed to labour for magnanimity, or, if that failed, at least for composure, she addressed him again; "but if this dispensation were to come, the dissolution of the mortal part is the least evil it comprizes; the other dreaded consequence—" and she shuddered, as she alluded to it—"God's mercy has given you the means to shun—then, Osmond, speak not of destruction—speak only of hope, for hope is come back to me, with you, and I can no longer despair. My dear, dear husband, bid me not despair—but bid me to be happy:" and throwing her arms round his neck, she hid her face in his bosom, as she continued to repeat, "let us take comfort—let us be happy!"

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"Heaven in its mercy grant it!" exclaimed Osmond, as he clasped her to his heart; "but it is granted;" and his rapid mind glanced back upon the horrible abyss of vice from which he had, though late, been permitted to return, and forward to the religious consolation, which his restoration to his wife held out for the amelioration of whatever portion of added life the bounty of Providence allotted him. "I *am* happy," he continued; "I am happy—fear not, my dearest Ellen—you will speak peace to my soul, and I shall yet be comforted."

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CHAP. XIII.

The first testimony of Osmond's repentance of the past was evinced by his pouring forth an ample confession to his injured wife, of every circumstance relating to his connexion with Caroline, as soon as the relapse into severe indisposition, which confined him to his bed for several days after his return, admitted of his entering upon the fatigue of conversation.

To say that she accorded him her forgiveness, would be saying little. The warmest sympathy that tears and tenderness could give, in presenting to him in a still clearer point of view the genuine piety and worth of the being

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whose peace he had trifled with, augmented, rather than alleviated the tortures of his remorse.

His mother, too, he pined to see again. In preparing himself for that far distant country, to which, however soothed by the fond hopes that seemed to be a part of the existence of Lady Ellen, he felt an indefinable, but strong presentiment that he was hastening, he languished for the pardon of all those to whom his faults had brought distress. And his mother! how cruelly did memory recal the instances of affection which, from his boyish years, had been lavished upon him by that dear parent! The disappointment he had inflicted upon her hopes—her pride in him—each of her blighted expectations came to his recollection with the severest pangs.

"If I could but live to see her again.

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Ellen," said he, one evening, a few days after his return, when he had been talking of her, and of the circumstance of her being then gone over to France and Italy, ignorant of his return to England, and perhaps, though not avowedly so, not without the hope of hearing tidings of him.

"You *will* live, Osmond," replied Lady Ellen, looking at him with a face, in which hope struggled vehemently with despair. "And why should we not follow Lady Arlington?" she continued; "a warmer climate has been suggested to you, as likely to be beneficial—dearest Osmond, let us think of this."

"Let us think of any thing that is to give you pleasure," he replied with a smile, "but for me—" he could not, though but too sensible, that however

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protracted his mortal disorder was still upon him—he could not bear to throw a damp upon the ardour of hope with which Lady Ellen (like all who fondly love) pursued every new idea that had the remotest possibility of being serviceable to the object of her cares.

As soon as he grew a little better, this journey to the Continent was more seriously discussed. Mr. Greville (who, on the first intelligence of his young friend's illness, had forgotten every thing but his former interest in him, and had come down to Richmond to visit him) added his recommendations to those of his physicians, that he should proceed immediately to try the effect of a winter's residence in the south of France, where also they expected to join Lady Arlington.

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He even offered to accompany them, and an additional inducement was thus thrown into the scale, to outweigh the objections to the scheme which still lingered in Osmond's mind.

The exhiliration which a change of scene imparts, and the unceasing endeavours of his companions to increase his comforts, and enliven his spirits, enabled him to reach Montpelier without any alteration for the worse in his health; but it was in vain that Lady Ellen strove to persuade herself that there was any change for the better.

He had scarcely arrived there, when he was attacked with a return of illness more severe than he had yet experienced.

"I wish I could but see my mother, Ellen," he said, as they were conversing one evening together.

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"I have written to her, my love," she replied, "and I expect she will be here by the end of the week."

"By the end of the week!" he repeated, with a dejected smile.

The despondency with which he spoke, conveyed to the imagination of Lady Ellen a conviction, which, amidst all her fears, had never yet struck with so freezing a chill upon her heart.

The possibility of losing him, she believed she had contemplated; but she found it had been only with that cursory regard, with which persons behold a dreaded event, which strong hope represents, if not wholly as uncertain, still as at too great a distance to justify much terror. But when Osmond brought this possibility so immediately present, and cast a chill upon her spirits, by

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shewing that he himself not only anticipated it; as the certain result of his present state of extreme lassitude and weakness; but as a result that might happen the next day, or the next hour —a sudden revulsion of feeling took possession of her mind—feeling, such as she had never experienced before! It was not sorrow, that, grieving for a threatened deprivation, spends itself in tears—it was not anxiety, that turns alternately from hope to despair, seeking every thing, and resting upon nothing—but it was one deep, overpowering emotion—an emotion, that, having impelled her to cast upon her husband one look of the tenderest commiseration, sent her from his presence to the consolation of prayer.

But ere this sacred balm of peace

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could be applied, some human feelings struggled for indulgence. The sorrows of her short, but suffering life, the brief glimpses of enjoyment, like the lightning's flash, gone as soon as visible, with which her sad existence had been cheered—were remembrances which excited mortal grievings, that for a little space claimed pre-eminence.

"It was so hard," she thought, "that the consummation of her afflictions, to which, through the last year of unparalleled trial, she had so often looked, was yet to be delayed; and that, ere her wounded, weary heart was motionless in the grave, another and another stroke must come."

"The anxious prayer is granted," she exclaimed; "I supplicated for his return, that I might bless and forgive

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him before I died; and that then my pilgrimage might close. But he is to depart—and I must linger! Oh mysterious dispensation!—but I am resigned. There is yet work for me to do: oh, my Father! sustain me in my trials—" and sinking on the ground, she raised to Heaven—not words—for there was neither speech, nor language; but aspirations—tears—the deep sacrifice of a broken and troubled spirit!

She returned to her husband, calm and resigned. The tears of holiness were wet upon her cheeks; the saintly smile of devotion played around her lips. He looked at her, as upon the messenger of peace. He extended his hand, and drew her towards him. They were both silent, but something of divine communion seemed to pass between

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their souls. He, like her, had been engaged in prayer.

The night was still and lovely, and Osmond desired to be removed towards the window of his apartment to look upon it. There they were sitting, Osmond retaining her hand in his, when, after a long silence, he spoke:

"These beautiful works of God, Ellen,—this moon, and these stars that now I gaze upon—they were always charming to my contemplation; but, in this hour, they seem to me to breathe of comfort. A creature trembling between two worlds, in looking upon this testimony of his Maker's power, believes that he reads the secret of his destiny. Silent, indeed, are these magnificent tokens of His omnipotence! but a voice is heard among them."

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"It is the voice of truth!" she replied with solemnity; "it is the voice of the God of nature, and of life."

"I feel its influence within me, dear wife!" said Osmond, with a tender smile; "but the heaviness of mortality is upon me, and all is heard and seen through the thick veil of flesh. A little space, and it will fall from my eyes, and they shall be opened!—But on what sights! oh, nature—poor human nature!"

The heart of Lady Ellen breathed an ardent prayer. "Divine Creator, help him in that tremendous crisis!" The motion of her lips, and of her elevated eyes, revealed to him her pious sympathy in his mortal tremblings. He pressed her hand, and both again were a long time silent.

This silence was interrupted by the

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entrance of Mr. Greville, who had been absent from them on a visit of a few days to a friend in the neighbourhood.

Lady Ellen watched his countenance, as he looked at Osmond, when he first paid him his salutation. She trembled to believe that she could read in it grief and surprise, at an alteration, she could by no efforts persuade herself had not occurred during his short separation from him.

Mr. Greville, after very little conversation, left the room. Lady Ellen quickly followed him. The hearts of both of them were too full for utterance. Lady Ellen languished to make the inquiry, "if Mr. Greville found his poor friend as much altered as she feared he might?" but the words expired upon her lips, and she could only bring out the syl-

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lables—" Do you—" she paused; her tears supplied the rest of the sentence.

He walked away, and for a few moments was silent—he returned: " Has Lady Arlington been sent for?" he articulated, in a low and faltering voice.

The meaning the question conveyed was too intelligible! Lady Ellen could only answer it with heavy sobs, and to give them freer vent, she hastened from the room.

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CHAP. XIV.

Lady Arlington arrived, as had been expected, in the course of the week. But, alas! she arrived too late! Of Osmond, that tenderly beloved son, there was nothing then remaining but the memory.

He had been declining for some days, and at last was incapable of leaving his bed; but on the evening preceding his death, he made so earnest a request to be permitted to rise, that it was thought desirable so comply with it. Lady Ellen, who had been constantly with him in these hours of suffering, was occupying her usual station by his side, when

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Mr. Greville entered his apartment, after a short absence.

He addressed a few words to Osmond; but the state of his own feelings at that moment did not admit of his appearing as easy as he wished to have done; and he removed to a distant window, to allow himself an interval for the recovery of his self-possession.

He was recalled to notice Osmond by his expressions of affectionate concern at the tears of Lady Ellen, who seemed equally with Mr. Greville to have been struck with dismay, at the visible and somewhat sudden alteration in Osmond's countenance since he left his bed.

Osmond soothed her—his voice was low, but his accents marked an attempt to be cheerful. He asked for his child—and though informed that he was

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asleep, he desired that he might be brought, and laid upon the sofa by his side.

Lady Ellen gratified this request; and he remained a long while after the boy was placed by him, hanging over him as he slept, and smiling, as, every now and then, the intense feelings of his nature betrayed themselves in the fondest expressions. Then, turning to Mr. Greville, "be a friend to him, Greville," he said, "and love him. But do not teach him philosophy—it does nothing for such an hour as this—oh, nothing—nothing," he continued; and pressing the hand of his wife, "this poor girl," said he, "has done more for me"—but emotion interrupted him, and he hid his face upon her shoulder.

Mr. Greville was much affected. He

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besought him to be still, and not thus to agitate his feeble spirits.

"All agitation will soon be over," he said; "all is passing away with me."

Mr. Greville took his wasted hand—"We must yet hope, Osmond," he said; "I could not bear to cease to hope for you."

"Then hope that I may be forgiven!" he exclaimed, with fervour, as he raised his eyes to Heaven, "for mortal hope there is none for me."

Lady Ellen, with streaming eyes, intreated him to repose himself a little while.

He smiled mournfully, "I *am* going to repose, Ellen," he said; "this life of storm and tempest is sinking into rest,

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and thus the passions perish! Great God! is this the whole result? is this the end of watchings, and of tears, and vain disquietudes? Is this the hour we look for in our thirst for joy? But it comes! it comes! and then frail man first learns his destiny—and then the ingrate thinks of Thee!"

"But will he then be gracious, Ellen?" and, trembling, he grasped her hand—"My spirits faint—I cannot—but you, my dearest—*pray*."

He pronounced the word with difficulty—but with energy the most affecting.

At this appeal a visible tremor shook her whole frame—she looked at Mr. Greville! how pale—how pitiful was the expression of her face.

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Mr. Greville, without speaking sunk down in a posture of devotion.

Oh, mysterious hour of dissolving nature! how instinctively, beneath thy influence, humanity falls prostrate before that dread Divinity, whose awful power, if never yet acknowledged, is then avowed by tremblings—and by prayer.

Lady Ellen still wept—she still trembled—but duty called upon her, and she summoned her whole strength to the trial.

"If this distress must come upon me," she faintly articulated, "my God, enable me to support it!" She looked again at Osmond—she looked to hope: but she saw that there was none—he was changed, even within the last few minutes.

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"My time is short, Ellen!" he murmured, in imperfect accents; "I would hear your sweet voice in supplication for me—that voice, so pleasant to my soul! pray for me, my Ellen!"

She clasped his hand between both her's, and, as she knelt by his side, she bowed her head upon it. "Oh, Heavenly Father!" she said, "if it be Thy will to call this suffering being hence, for the sake of Him who died for us—be merciful to him, and forgive."

Her words were gradually lost in heavy sobs; and it was only with her uplifted eyes and supplicating hands she could continue to intreat for him.

A long time elapsed in silence; and they were yet in an attitude of prayer,

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absorbed in the fullness of emotion, when Osmond spoke:

"My head, Ellen!" he said; she raised it tenderly upon her bosom: He extended his hand to Mr. Greville, who took it, and pressed it to his heart.

"And, my child!" he added: "I cannot well discern him."

Lady Ellen guided his hand to his soft cheek.

He then turned upon them both such a look of love!

"Is this to die?" he said. "Then is it sweet, indeed!" He was then silent for a long interval; but once more he attempted to say something. It was a name only—he did not quite pronounce it—it was the name of Caroline!

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The struggle of a moment ensued—a pang of nature in her last farewell! and in the arms of his wife his mortal frame remained. But it was nothing—Osmond was no more!

FINIS.

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